AFCON 2021 COUNTDOWN

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The electric South Korea star making waves in England

PLAYER PROFILES

PEDRI & CAMAVINGA

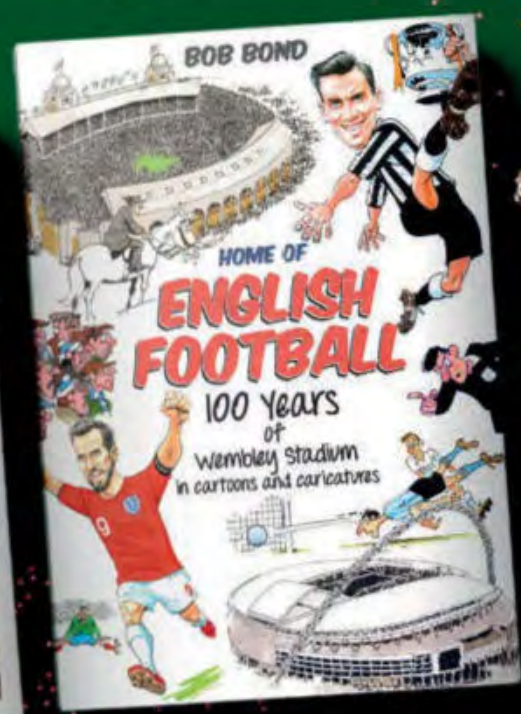
The future of the Clasico

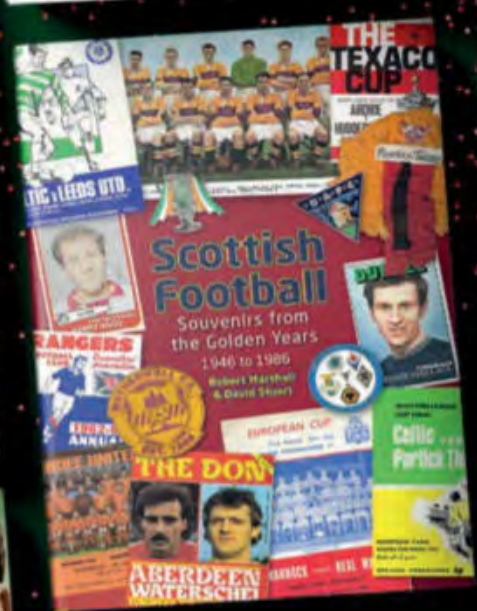
PLUS

- BENELIGA SPECIAL REPORT
- GREENLAND
- NEWCASTLE REBUILD
- INDIAN SUPER LEAGUE
- ARAB CUP
- RYAN GAULD INTERVIEW
- A-LEAGUE

GREAT GIFT IDEAS THIS CHRISTMAS

pitch





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In Pictures

The global game caught on camera

Greenland...a football pitch in Qeqertarsuaq, western Greenland, in the summer surrounded by icebergs
(credit: Aningaaq R. Carlsen, Visit Greenland)

Italy...Lorenzo Insigne dribbles while wearing Napoli's one-off tribute kit to Diego Maradona

England...Crystal Palace fans unveil a banner criticising the Saudi Arabian regime during their match with Newcastle United

Dubai...Mohammad Moradi attempts a bicycle kick in the Intercontinental Beach Soccer Cup match between Iran and Japan

France...Saint-Etienne fans protest at their team's poor performances ahead of the Ligue 1 clash versus Angers

France...PSG forward Neymar is shielded by security during *Le Classique* to protect him from missiles being thrown by Marseille supporters

Mexico...Monterrey players dive towards the trophy after winning the CONCACAF Champions League

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FROM THE EDITOR

Football is, as we all know, a ruthless business – five Premier League managers losing their jobs by early November (already surpassing the whole of last season's total managerial casualties) provides a stark example of that. It will be fascinating to see how Newcastle United rebuild under Eddie Howe (page 16), and how Tottenham Hotspur and Aston Villa fare under new managers Antonio Conte and Steven Gerrard (page 20).

Similarly, a huge rebuild is required at Barcelona, with the hope that the appointment of club legend Xavi will arrest their recent decline. The future now looks much brighter for *Blaugrana*, especially as one of the world's most promising teenagers, Pedri, is already among their ranks and will likely be their midfield lynchpin for the next decade and beyond. Not to be outdone, as is always the case with their *Clasico* rivals, Real Madrid have a starlet with similar career aspirations and potential, in the form of Eduardo Camavinga, and Nick Bidwell tracks the twin progression of both teenage tyros thus far (page 40).

Pedri and Camavinga leaving vastly smaller clubs (Las Palmas and Rennes respectively) for pastures new at elite European giants represented something of a gamble for both, and players going out of their comfort zones is a recurring theme of this issue. We speak to Ryan Gauld (page 54) who, after leaving Scotland as a teenager for Portugal, is now embarking on a new journey in Major League Soccer with Vancouver Whitecaps, while Dom Dwyer has also forged a remarkable career for himself in MLS since leaving England's non-league scene (page 58).

> Players going out of their comfort zones is a recurring theme of this issue

The extraordinary journey Leon Bailey has undertaken to make it to the top – from Jamaica to Aston Villa via Austria, Slovakia, Belgium and Germany – is documented by Ben Bocsak (page 62), while even more extraordinary is the tale told by Mark Gleeson of Gambia's Ebrima Darboe (page 32), the tragic but inspiring story of refugee to Africa Cup of Nations star.

Indeed the AFCON is just around the corner, and this issue continues to build up to January's tournament in Cameroon with a feature on defending champions Algeria (page 22), and interviews with Malawi coach Meke Mwase (page 52) and Gambia boss Tom Saintfiet (page 18). Be sure to read the next edition of *World Soccer* for a comprehensive preview of the tournament, as well as our annual awards.

Stephen Fishlock, Group Editor

Homecoming... Xavi in the Nou Camp dugout

SPAIN

Barcelona return is a "dream come true" for Xavi

New Barcelona coach Xavi admitted it had been his dream to return to the club ever since he departed in 2015, following his appointment as Ronald Koeman's replacement. "I feel that Barca is my home, but I know that I have a very big responsibility," he told *Barca+* in his first interview after returning. "I arrive in a complicated moment for the club, but I feel prepared.

"My DNA has not changed: the idea of being the protagonist, to have the ball, create chances, an intense Barca. We must recover many things."

Xavi wasted no time in imposing a number of rules at the club in an attempt to improve discipline. According to *Diario AS*, players will be expected to arrive at least an hour and a half early for training, eat together at the training ground, and limit their media and commercial commitments. Xavi was also keen to emphasise that starting places had to be earned in training, and nobody had any guarantees – even his former team-mates Gerard Pique, Jordi Alba and Sergio Busquets. "We have to be all for one so that Barca can aspire to winning titles," he added.

Another of Xavi's first acts was to fire two of the club's physios, with injuries playing a big part in the club's stuttering start to the campaign.

The spotlight is likely to be placed on a number of players, with Ousmane Dembele singled out by the new coach in his first press conference. The Frenchman has struggled for consistency since his €147 million move from Dortmund in 2017, but Xavi said: "Dembele in his position can be the best player in the world. It's important to have a winning mentality and

"I would love to be a technical director at some point. I don't know if it will be at Barcelona or not. If there is a possibility, I would like to contribute again because it's the club that I love"

Lionel Messi suggests that he could also return to the Nou Camp one day

consistency. We have to help him."

Meanwhile, the other member of Barcelona's legendary midfield, Andres Iniesta, has backed his former team-mate to be a success. "He's a perfect fit, that's for sure. Not just because of what he knows about the club, but because he's prepared for it", the Vissel Kobe star told *beIN Sports*.

"I wish him all the luck in the world and I am convinced he will be fine because he's ready and very excited for the challenge."

SWITZERLAND

Blatter and Platini charged with fraud

Sepp Blatter and Michel Platini, the former presidents of FIFA and UEFA, respectively, will face trial in Switzerland having been charged with fraud. Both men have denied any and all wrongdoing.

Blatter completed a final set of investigatory interviews in August after various delays because of his fragile state of health. He underwent heart surgery last December and could be questioned for only 90 minutes each day.

The investigation concerns the payment by FIFA, on the orders of then-president Blatter, of two million Swiss francs to Platini in early 2011.

At the time, Platini was both UEFA president and a FIFA vice-president, but the work for which he claimed the payment had been undertaken ten years earlier when he worked as Blatter's "football counsellor".

Prosecutors believe the two men lied about the reason for the payment, which was made a few months before Blatter's unopposed re-election as FIFA president in June 2011.

Blatter has been charged with fraud, mismanagement, misappropriation of FIFA funds, and forgery of a document. Platini has been charged with fraud, misappropriation, forgery and as an accomplice to Blatter's alleged mismanagement.

The trial will be held in Bellinzona early next year. The maximum punishments for such offences runs to prison terms of five years.

Keir Radnedge

Charged... Blatter (L) and Platini (R)

HEROES & VILLAINS

Coming out... Josh Cavallo

JOSH CAVALLO

"I am a footballer and I am gay," said Cavallo in a video posted by his club Adelaide United, as the Australian became the only openly gay male top-flight professional footballer in the world. "I have been fighting my sexuality for six years now and I'm glad I can put that to rest," he added, while players, managers and clubs from around the world greeted the news with supportive messages. The hope is that Cavallo coming out will break the stigma that exists in the game, although the 21-year-old has admitted he would be "scared" to play at next year's World Cup in Qatar, where homosexuality is illegal.

VIVIANNE MIEDEMA & LISA EVANS

The WSL stars are the latest footballers to sign up for the Common Goal charity movement. The organisation, which was set up by Juan Mata, asks players to commit one per cent of their salary to support various causes. Miedema and her partner Evans were also joined by Rangers' duo Tudor Baluta and Ianis Hagi, who became the first Romanian players to get involved.

SAM DENHAM

On his way to Brechin City's Scottish Cup tie against Haddington Athletic, defender Denham was involved in a serious car crash, along with one of his team-mates. In spite of this, the 18-year-old still made it to the game in time to play, and, even more remarkably, scored his first-ever senior goal in a 2-1 victory.

TRENT ALEXANDER-ARNOLD

The right-back has set up a new league for five and six-year-olds to play football in Liverpool's more deprived areas, with more than 250 kids already benefitting from the initiative. "Trent came up with this idea himself," said Liverpool's head of pre-academy recruitment, Ian Barrigan. "Thanks to the funding he's provided, we've now set up these two development centres."

EDGARS GAURACS

The former Latvia striker has been handed a ten-year ban for match fixing. The 33-year-old, who had been working as a general director of Latvian side Spartaks Jurmala, was allegedly charged in relation to a Champions League qualifier between his side and Red Star Belgrade in 2018. Gauracs labelled the charges "a huge misunderstanding".

PREMIER LEAGUE

The Premier League have rejected the #NoHomeKit initiative that would have raised funds and awareness for the UK's housing crisis. Homeless charity Shelter proposed that, on Boxing Day, each of the league's home teams would wear their away kit, with the unworn shirts then auctioned off. A Premier League spokesperson said: "The Premier League receives a large number of requests from charities every season, however we aren't able to support all centrally."

HURACAN LAS HERAS FANS

After fighting broke out in the stands at the end of the Argentine third-tier game between Huracan Las Heras and Ferro de General Pico, players were forced to take cover when gunshots were fired across the stadium. The visitors' coach, Mauricio Romero, was taken to hospital after being shot in the shoulder. "May all those that harm the club stay away so that the real fans can return," said Huracan in a Facebook post.

DAVID HENDERSON

The man who organised the flight that killed Emiliano Sala has been sentenced to 18 months in prison after being found guilty of endangering the safety of an aircraft. Sala had just signed for Cardiff City in a club-record transfer, and was travelling to Wales from Nantes with pilot David Ibbotson when their plane crashed into the English Channel in January 2019.

Convicted... Henderson

"Cole has a special quality…but I know how it works with young players. We are calm and patient, like we have been with Phil Foden as well"

Pep Guardiola discusses Manchester City's next prodigy, Cole Palmer, after the 19-year-old's emergence

Thiago ALMADA

(Velez Sarsfield)

Described by Joel Richards in the 2020 *World Soccer* 500 as one of the "prime candidates" to take up the mantle for Argentina after Lionel Messi retires, Almada has been on the radar of the world's top clubs for a while. It represents something of a coup, then, for Atlanta United to have landed the 20-year-old from Velez Sarsfield.

Though the deal has not, at the time of writing, been officially announced, the player has reportedly confirmed it.

A diminutive winger or No.10 with impressive dribbling skills, Almada had scored seven goals and assisted six in 27 league games when news of his move broke in November.

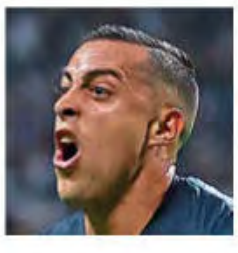
The transfer is part of a wider theme of MLS clubs recruiting in South America. He will join Ezequiel Barco – who made a similar move in 2018 – in Atlanta's attack, while another Argentine, Valentin Castellanos, won this season's MLS Golden Boot.

Enes SALI
(Farul Constanta)
The Canada-born 15-year-old was called up by Romania for the November internationals. Released by Barcelona in 2019 due to registration issues.

Erik BOTHEIM
(Bodo/Glimt)
Botheim had a hand in six of the eight Europa Conference League goals that Bodo/Glimt scored against Roma, and has since been linked with a move to the Italian club.

Ben ELLIOTT
(Chelsea)
The attacking midfielder could be the latest promising graduate of Chelsea's academy to walk away from the club, with his contract set to expire in 2022.

Mohamed-Ali CHO
(Angers)
Former England youth international, and PSG and Everton academy starlet, now a member of the France Under-21 squad and Ligue 1 regular at just 17.



Rogelio FUNES MORI
(Monterrey)
The Argentina-born forward hit five goals in 12 caps after switching international allegiance to Mexico earlier this year, then scored the winning goal in the CONCACAF Champions League final.

James HILL
(Fleetwood Town)
Son of former Bristol City and Preston North End defender Matt, Hill received an England Under-21 call-up despite playing in the third tier of English football.

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

SEASON RANKINGS
Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

Edouard Mendy (Chelsea)	7
Manuel Neuer (Bayern Munich)	5
David Ospina (Napoli)	4
Ederson (Manchester City)	2
Bono (Sevilla)	1
Thibaut Courtois (Real Madrid)	1
Gianluigi Donnarumma (PSG)	1
Mark Flekken (Freiburg)	1
Mike Maignan (Milan)	1
Jan Oblak (Atletico Madrid)	1
Aaron Ramsdale (Arsenal)	1
Maty Ryan (Real Sociedad)	1

DEFENDERS

Kalidou Koulibaly (Napoli)	16
Achraf Hakimi (PSG)	8
Ruben Dias (Manchester City)	7
Virgil van Dijk (Liverpool)	6
Joao Cancelo (Manchester City)	5
Antonio Rudiger (Chelsea)	5
Ben Chilwell (Chelsea)	4
Alphonso Davies (Bayern Munich)	4
Marquinhos (PSG)	4
David Alaba (Real Madrid)	3
Trent Alexander-Arnold (Liverpool)	3
Reece James (Chelsea)	3
Andy Robertson (Liverpool)	3
Thiago Silva (Chelsea)	3
Marcos Alonso (Chelsea)	2
Davide Calabria (Milan)	2
Giovanni Di Lorenzo (Napoli)	2
Dayot Upamecano (Bayern Munich)	2
Cesar Azpilicueta (Chelsea)	1
Jerome Boateng (Lyon)	1
Leonardo Bonucci (Juventus)	1
Andreas Christensen (Chelsea)	1
Aaron Cresswell (West Ham United)	1
Stefan de Vrij (Internazionale)	1
Aritz Elustondo (Real Sociedad)	1
Raphael Guerreiro (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Theo Hernandez (Milan)	1
Mats Hummels (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Philipp Lienhart (Freiburg)	1
Jesus Navas (Sevilla)	1
Benjamin Pavard (Bayern Munich)	1
Mario Rui (Napoli)	1
Milan Skriniar (Internazionale)	1
Jean-Clair Todibo (Nice)	1
Takehiro Tomiyasu (Arsenal)	1
Lucas Verissimo (Benfica)	1
Kyle Walker (Manchester City)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Joshua Kimmich (Bayern Munich)	11
Nicolo Barella (Internazionale)	6
Idrissa Gueye (PSG)	5
Jorginho (Chelsea)	5
Mikel Merino (Real Sociedad)	4
Phil Foden (Manchester City)	3
Thomas Muller (Bayern Munich)	3
Fabian (Napoli)	2
Bruno Fernandes (Manchester United)	2
Franck Kessie (Milan)	2
Mason Mount (Chelsea)	2
Declan Rice (West Ham United)	2
Sandro Tonali (Milan)	2
Florian Wirtz (Bayer Leverkusen)	2
Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa (Napoli)	2
Houssem Aouar (Lyon)	1
Jude Bellingham (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Ismael Bennacer (Milan)	1
Steven Berghuis (Ajax)	1
Marcelo Brozovic (Internazionale)	1
Casemiro (Real Madrid)	1
Kevin De Bruyne (Manchester City)	1
Leon Goretzka (Bayern Munich)	1
Kai Havertz (Chelsea)	1
Ander Herrera (PSG)	1
Luka Modric (Real Madrid)	1
Jamal Musiala (Bayern Munich)	1
Christopher Nkunku (RB Leipzig)	1
Dimitri Payet (Marseille)	1
Paul Pogba (Manchester United)	1
Bukayo Saka (Arsenal)	1
Bernardo Silva (Manchester City)	1
Youri Tielemans (Leicester City)	1
Hans Vanaken (Club Brugge)	1
Axel Witsel (Borussia Dortmund)	1

FORWARDS

Mohamed Salah (Liverpool)	20
Robert Lewandowski (Bayern Munich)	18
Erling Haaland (Borussia Dortmund)	6
Vinicius Junior (Real Madrid)	6
Karim Benzema (Real Madrid)	5
Cristiano Ronaldo (Manchester United)	5
Leroy Sane (Bayern Munich)	4
Sebastien Haller (Ajax)	3
Victor Osimhen (Napoli)	3
Karim Adeyemi (Red Bull Salzburg)	2
Romelu Lukaku (Chelsea)	2
Kylian Mbappe (PSG)	2
Giovanni Simeone (Verona)	2
Luis Diaz (Porto)	1
Breel Embolo (B. Monchengladbach)	1
Serge Gnabry (Bayern Munich)	1
Ciro Immobile (Lazio)	1
Lorenzo Insigne (Napoli)	1
Alexander Isak (Real Sociedad)	1
Lionel Messi (PSG)	1
Dusan Vlahovic (Fiorentina)	1

ESM MEMBERS: *A Bola* (Portugal), *Fanatik* (Turkey), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Germany), *La Gazzetta dello Sport* (Italy), *Kicker* (Germany), *Marca* (Spain), *Nemzeti Sport* (Hungary), *Sport Express* (Russia), *Sport/Foot* (Belgium), *De Telegraaf* (Netherlands), *TIPS Bladet* (Denmark), *ElfVoetbal* (Netherlands), *World Soccer* (England)

Keir RADNEDGE
THE INSIDER

Time is ticking for football at the Olympics

Football does not need the Olympics and the Olympics does not need football. For years it's been a partnership of prestige. Now political reality is cutting in.

The bizarre prospect of a World Cup every two years is fading fast after powerful and noisy European-led opposition, so something else will have to give in the congested international calendar.

So why not the Olympic football tournaments? That is the thinking. After all, the Games are not a FIFA-brand event and that two week-slot every four years could be usefully jammed with something Zurich can control.

European clubs would be delighted to see the back of the four-yearly wrangle over player release. The Games are not a FIFA event, so they are not duty-bound to free up star names. But many players (and their agents) want the glittering reflection cast by those iconic gold medals. So do federations beyond unhelpful northern Europe, such as recent Tokyo finalists Brazil and Spain.

In international football's fledgling years before World War I, the amateur Olympic Games was the de facto world championship. Since the creation of the World Cup in 1930, however, Olympic football has been a reputational mess.

From the 1950s to the 1980s, it was dominated by the so-called "state amateurs" of communist-controlled Eastern Europe. Then, once Spanish Olympic president Juan Antonio Samaranch had scrapped the amateurism pretence, the boot switched to the other foot.

Now football imposed conditions, demanding that the Games become an Under-23 tournament with the caveat of three over-age players per team. Pressure from the United States ensured the introduction of a women's tournament in 1996 in Atalanta.

An increasingly uneasy truce has existed ever since. The Olympics swiftly became far more important for the fast-developing women's game, and even less important for the men. The women's teams can field their best players without restriction. They have, in essence, a world championship every two years: one under the FIFA banner, one under the auspices of the International Olympic Committee.

But for how much longer? The status quo for men and women remains in place for Paris in 2024 and, given the high profile of the US women, will survive for Los Angeles in 2028. But beyond that?

Europe, by and large, would shed no tears if the unloved men's football tournament vanished from the Olympic programme. Under former president Jacques Rogge, the IOC chased sports such as tennis and golf to raise the TV ratings. Now that the IOC has long-term media finance security, it has turned its attention to

Time's up...players of Brazil and Spain at the final whistle of the 2020 Olympic final

any and every minority sport to appeal to its diminishing youth audience.

Some IOC members would be delighted to lose football. The Games has worked for the past two decades on a maximum participation of 15,000 sportsmen and women. Football takes up 352 slots for the men (22 players for 16 teams) and 264 for the women. That could free up competitive space for one or two other minority, individualistic sports.

Tempting.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino, who still needs a summer space for his pet project, the expanded Club World Cup, would doubtless weep few tears. Anyway, FIFA has so little regard for the Olympics that it did not bother to formally warn IOC president Thomas Bach that it was proposing to tread on his summer-time toes with a World Cup every two years.

Bach, having just welcomed Infantino into the exclusivity of IOC membership, was not amused. That bruising of Olympic pride provoked an unusually blunt response over both the biennial World Cup proposals and the failure to consult the international sports movement in general and IOC in particular.

In a backhanded compliment to football's popularity, the IOC complained about the impact of calendar change on "other major international sports [such as] tennis, cycling, golf, gymnastics, swimming, athletics, Formula 1 and many others." A doubling-up on the World Cup "would undermine the diversity and development of sports other than football."

In a final barbed comment, the IOC concluded that what FIFA had described as a "widespread consultation" was nothing of the sort.

Dominant...the US women's team have won a record four gold medals

Heading across Switzerland from Lausanne to Zurich, it's clear a developing subtext to the biennial World Cup project (promoted by FIFA development director Arsene Wenger) was an unspoken hint of quitting the Olympics. This even emerged as a strand of the thinking behind staging a Women's World Cup every two years.

Jill Ellis is the US' double Women's World Cup-winning coach who leads FIFA's technical study group on the women's calendar. She gave away the game (or Games) by telling a media briefing: "We have 24 teams at the Women's World Cup but only half the number, 12, at the Olympics. Europe, for example, has only three teams at the Olympics compared with eight at the Women's World Cup. It's no contest."

FIFA has summoned all of its 211 member associations to an online summit on December 20. Infantino and Co. will propose an agreed compromise for a new calendar to take effect from 2028. Wenger wants to take over the entire month of October (and maybe March) for national team football. The European Leagues organisation proposed maintaining the status quo with international windows continuing to be interspersed throughout the established continuous club season.

European club football has its own gathering storm in the shape of the mega clubs who dominate the financial and trophy landscape: Manchester City and Chelsea in England (with Manchester United and Liverpool breathlessly racing to stay in touch), Paris Saint-Germain in France and Bayern Munich in Germany. Even the Spanish giants of Real Madrid and Barcelona are in danger of being left behind.

Intriguingly the monopolistic power of these mega clubs is making national team football around the world more important once again. This is the arena in which regional and intercontinental competition remains better balanced and offers more opportunity for visibility.

Once upon a time club managers – such as Wenger when he was wearing his Arsenal hat – wrote off national team football as redundant, moribund, dying on the football vine. In fact the new calendar's potential to clear space for maybe a World Nations League can put fresh wind in football's competitive and developmental sails.

Either way, there appears no place for Olympic football in Infantino, Ellis and Wenger's brave new world.

> FIFA has so little regard for the Olympics that it did not bother to formally warn IOC president Thomas Bach that it was proposing a World Cup every two years. Bach was not amused

BOOKS THIS MONTH

EURO SUMMITS
By Jonathan O'Brien (Pitch Publishing, £19.99)

Panenka's penalty in Belgrade, Van Basten's volley of a lifetime in Munich, Gazza's near-miss at Wembley: over its six decades, the UEFA European Championship has thrown up many of the most memorable stories in football lore. Dramatic, detailed and teeming with compelling personalities like Michel Platini, Hristo Stoichkov, Zinedine Zidane, Wayne Rooney and Cristiano Ronaldo, this is the complete story of a footballing event second only to the World Cup.

SCOTLAND'S LOST CLUBS
By Jeff Webb (Pitch Publishing, £16.99)

Scotland's Lost Clubs: Giving the Names You've Heard the Story They Own is the gripping, constantly surprising, intrinsically romantic and all too commonly tragic story of some of Scotland's lost football clubs. You'll be taken on a journey across Scotland, from the Highlands to the English border, with tales of some of the most important names in world football and the impact they had on the modern game. It's essential reading for any Scottish football fan.

Jonathan WILSON

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Eddie Howe faces a uniquely difficult task

Among all the many managerial changes that have already taken place in this season's Premier League, the appointment of Eddie Howe by Newcastle United forces us to confront fundamentals in how we assess management.

Presented with a side that is struggling in the relegation zone, how do you transform it into a team of dreams that can challenge for the Champions League while playing thrilling, attacking football? It is some way from being the main issue at Newcastle, but beyond the craven acceptance of owners with no respect for human rights, the club also presents an intriguing tactical challenge.

When Steve Bruce was dismissed after eight games of the season, Newcastle had three points and had not kept a clean sheet. Although the club had the 13th-highest wage bill in the Premier League, they were 19th and falling. The first task for Howe, then, is staying up: getting some points on the board before January, then hoping to bring in a handful of players to achieve survival.

New appointment... Eddie Howe at St. James' Park in 2019

> The first task for Howe is staying up: getting some points on the board before January, then hoping to bring in a handful of players to achieve survival. But which players are likely to want to join a relegation fight?

But which players are likely to want to join a relegation fight? It's hard to imagine a player confident his career is on the rise gleefully leaping aboard a project that might be bound for the Championship, and so that means high wages will be necessary.

Newcastle are not an aspirational mid-table Premier League side in the way that Manchester City were at the time of the Abu Dhabi takeover – and the gulf from mid-table to the top is probably greater now than it was back then. There is no core of high-level players such as Vincent Kompany and Pablo Zabaleta, Joe Hart and Micah Richards, who can be the basis of the bold new future.

Stopping the leakage of goals is an area where Newcastle need obvious action. The requirement is for reliable, experienced figures, with perhaps a little midfield inspiration to enhance the supply to Allan Saint-Maximin and Callum Wilson. But the dynamic is necessarily odd: perhaps they will find a young star in the making, but realistically Newcastle will be signing players who, if all goes well, they won't need in a couple of years. The demands now are for short-term action; there's no point beginning the long-term process of implementing a philosophy if it is derailed by relegation.

But at the same time, money cannot be wasted – not because the Saudi owners cannot afford it, but because of the limits imposed by Financial Fair Play. Exactly what those limits are is difficult to assess but, according to the @SwissRamble Twitter feed, unless there is a radical upturn in revenue, around £200m of signings a year on average – assuming they receive fairly standard salaries – would seem reasonable for the first two to three seasons.

But keeping a weak side up requires a different skill-set to building a team that can begin to climb the table – which is a difficult enough task. Even if they will come, adding four big names to an average

Top scorer... striker Callum Wilson needs support

team is unlikely to work: the side becomes unbalanced, too reliant on its stars. That process of development, incrementally building a team, slowly improving it, takes patience and skill, a capacity to plan ahead that does not necessarily go hand in hand with the defensive organisation and sharp shock that may be needed to keep Newcastle up if things don't improve significantly between now and January.

And once that core is there, it's entirely possible another manager is needed to take the club to the very highest level – and not just because by that point the existing manager may have been in situ for five or six years and staleness may have begun to set in. Different levels of clubs require different attributes, which is why the argument that Pep Guardiola has never done it at a Rochdale or Southend United is so futile. Of course he hasn't – he's a brilliant coach of extremely good players. He can take a first touch for granted and assume players can follow, at least up to a point, his tactical instructions. With weaker sides he would have to begin to take account of the shortcomings of players.

Similarly Neil Warnock has led eight clubs to promotion. He has consistently been an excellent manager lower down the football pyramid, but nobody thinks he should ever have been made manager of Barcelona. Not all clubs are the same and not all football is the same.

And, while it's probably true that a lot of clubs are too impatient, it may also be the case that, in certain circumstances, it would make sense for a promoted club to replace their manager before the start of the new season, even though that goes against the broader sense that people deserve a chance to prove themselves.

If Newcastle can stay up, it does not necessarily follow that Howe is the man to lead their assault on Champions League qualification. Different stages of development may require different managers.

REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

Chaos... Internacional players mocking arch-rivals Gremio

1 GREMIO GRIEF

Gremio were at the centre of hugely chaotic scenes twice within a week. First, in their league match with Palmeiras, fans stormed the pitch after a VAR decision went against them. Supporters thought they'd seen their team make it 2-2 only for the late "equaliser" to be ruled out, with Palmeiras adding insult to injury by making it 3-1 shortly afterwards. After invading the pitch, Gremio fans targeted the VAR monitor and other TV equipment, before police managed to restore calm. The team from Porto Alegre, who are struggling at the foot of Serie A, will likely face stadium closures as a result. A week later, fighting broke out on the pitch when their local rivals Internacional celebrated beating them by raising fake coffins to mock the demise of their neighbours.

2 SERIOUS ABOUT SAUSAGES

Sweden coach Janne Andersson has taken his country to two major tournaments and won a league title with Norrkoping, but his greatest honour may have been bestowed upon him in November. "It feels fantastic...I never expected that I would get this nice prize," he said after being recognised by the Swedish Sausage Academy for his love of hot dogs. During the 2018 World Cup, Andersson admitted to eating one before every match, with his favourite condiment flown in from home. "Considering how many hot dogs I have eaten over the years, I can say that I am a good representative of the hot dog," he said.

3 PSG PROBE

Investigations are ongoing after PSG Feminine midfielder Kheira Hamraoui was dragged from a car and attacked by masked men. Her team-mate, Aminata Diallo, had been arrested amid media allegations that she had arranged the attack in order to eliminate her fellow midfielder from team selection, but police later released her without charge. In a statement, Diallo said the investigation will show her "complete and total innocence".

4 BANG OUT OF ORDER

Fireworks interrupted two different games either side of the Irish Sea in November. An English non-league game between Hashtag United and Concord Rangers was abandoned after a pyrotechnic landed close to one of the players, burning his sock, while two fans were arrested and handed indefinite bans after setting off fireworks during the Irish league clash between Waterford and Shamrock Rovers.

5 MILAN DERBY DRAMA

Ahead of the first Milan derby of the season, the spotlight was very much on Hakan Calhanoglu, coming just a few months on from his controversial transfer to Inter. What unfolded has sewn the seeds for an intriguing subplot to every *Derby della Madonnina* for years to come. Predictably, the midfielder was booed throughout the game, especially after putting his new team 1-0 up. "I'll do as usual," he said when asked before the game whether he would celebrate scoring, but in the moment chose instead to cup his ears to the Milan fans, prompting an infuriated Alessandro Florenzi to run off the bench to confront him. After the match, Calhanoglu posted a video of the goal on Instagram, with the caption: "I M Hakan, I M Inter." Two days later, the Milan Ultras group *Curva Sud* responded by hanging an explicit banner off a bridge in the city, calling him a "cuckold" and a "s*** man." All eyes will be on the Turk again for the rematch in February.

Provocative... Calhanoglu's San Siro celebration

Tom SAINTFIET

GUEST COLUMNIST

All the federations should be trying to persuade as many players as possible to get vaccinated

The Gambia's head coach discusses dealing with COVID, and assesses the favourites at AFCON 2021.

This will be the first COVID-19 Africa Cup of Nations in history. I don't know if that's an honour but it's the first time that we will have to cope.

In the Gambia, we have been working very hard against the virus. We chartered private planes, all the players have stayed in single rooms throughout the qualifiers to minimise the risk, and we have an international medical team.

We had to cancel a friendly game with Guinea in Portugal in 2020 when eight of their players got the virus, but so far we have been lucky.

Almost all of my possible players are vaccinated. For some, like Dembo Darboe, it's been complex because he plays in Belarus, but all the federations should be trying to persuade as many players as possible to get vaccinated. This will minimise the chances of the virus spreading, as we don't want it to ruin the tournament.

The decision to allow countries to take 28 players to the finals instead of 23 will be interesting. It's an option and the extra players has to be at the country's own cost, but it could be very interesting to add some extra options.

In the Gambia, we are not a rich federation, but on the other side we know the consequences and you never get a second chance to make your AFCON debut. So of course, you want to do everything.

All the African countries want the tournament to be a success and for that we also want all the best players made available by their clubs. FIFA's rules say that if a player has to quarantine for more than five days after returning home, then their club do not have to release them for national team duty.

Determined... Gambian striker Musa Barrow of Bologna

There is a lot of talk about player overload, and UEFA and the European clubs complain about releasing the players. But the national team matches have not really increased – what has changed is that more and more clubs are playing European football.

The clubs need to understand that none of the teams are going to the finals in Cameroon as tourists. The players are staying in hotels that are bubbles, where people are tested three or four times a week and rules are respected.

It's important that every player is released; if not it's very disrespectful for African football, and the players want to come. I have players even in the top European leagues that are saying to me: "Coach, I will come even if they try to stop me".

I really hope that FIFA, CAF, UEFA and everyone else push for the importance of national team football and allow their players to go to Cameroon.

A player will represent a lot of different clubs but only one national team and that team represents everyone in that country. From the little boy to the old grandmother, they all want a chance to see their national team play and this is the pinnacle of African football.

Who will win is hard to guess; in the last five AFCONs there has been a different winner every time. Zambia, who won in 2012, are not there, but all the traditional African powerhouses will be.

Algeria, who were champions at the last AFCON in Egypt in 2019, must be the favourites. They have a very good squad, have kept their coach Djamel Belmadi and have gone 31 games without defeat.

Senegal have never won but they were runners up to Algeria in the last AFCON and also lost the 2002 final in Mali. There cannot be many teams among the favourites who have never won before, but Senegal are.

Nigeria and Cameroon are traditional African powerhouses and are both always strong. Cameroon have won five AFCON titles, the most after Egypt, and they will benefit from being the hosts.

The other country that I think can win is Morocco. They have such a strong domestic league and many players in the top European leagues, like Hakim Ziyech at Chelsea. But they have only won once, and that was back in 1976; since then, they have made the knockout round of the World Cup but only made the AFCON final once in 2004.

All these big countries have quality players and will benefit from being seeded first in their group, so they have a much easier route to the final than a team that qualifies after finishing third in their group. I expect the winner to come from one of these five teams.

Tom Saintfiet was speaking to Steve Menary

"Algeria must be the favourites"

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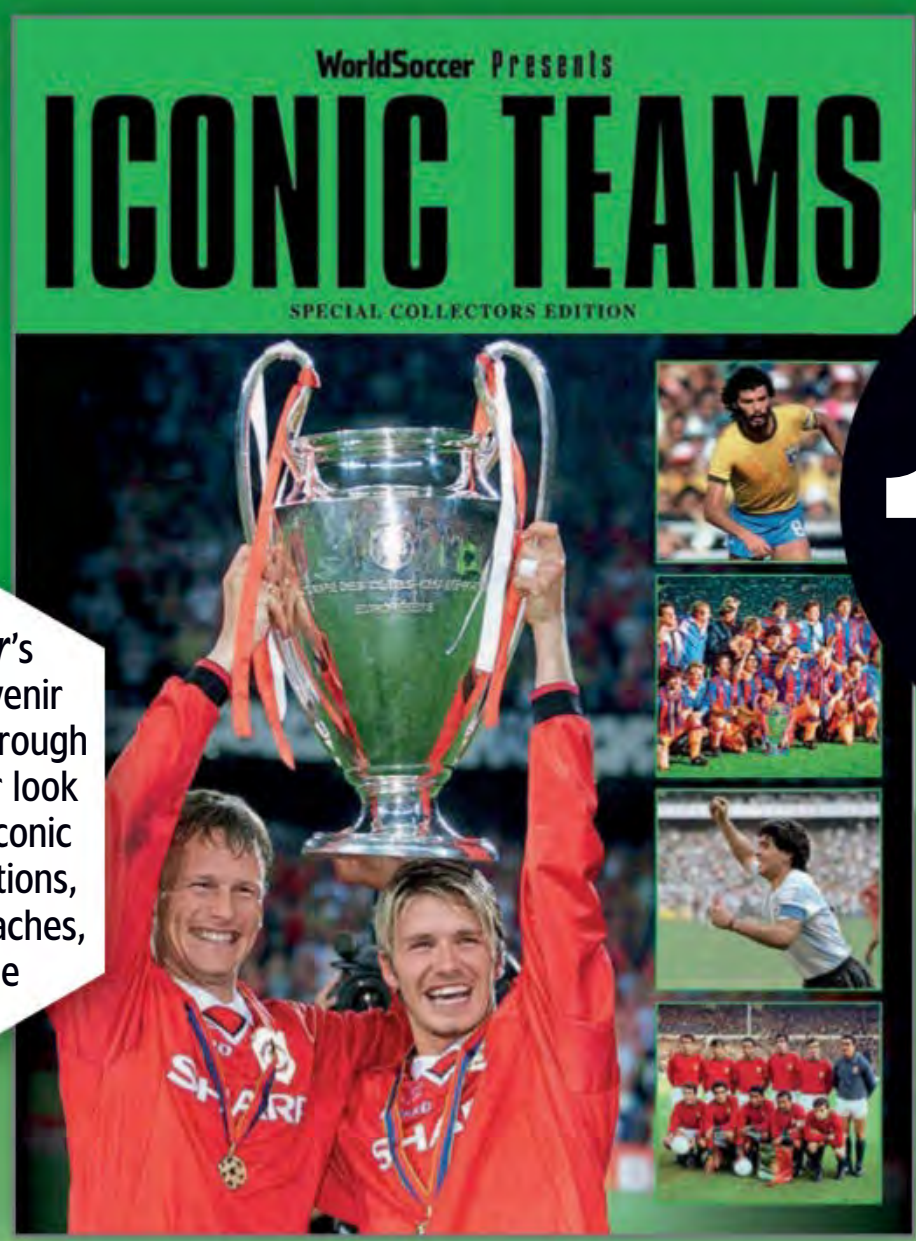

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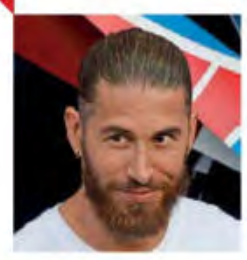


"Sergio Ramos is not planning to retire or break his contract. There is no doubt about Sergio. It's a physical problem, he will play when he can"

Sergio Ramos' agent and brother Rene responds to rumours that the defender will have his PSG contract torn up

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

First club job... Andriy Shevchenko

EUROPE

In addition to Antonio Conte and Steven Gerrard, **EDDIE HOWE** also returned to the Premier League to take charge of Newcastle United.

Former Sheffield United manager **CHRIS WILDER** replaced Neil Warnock as Middlesbrough boss.

Bournemouth completed the free transfer of Republic of Ireland international winger **ROBBIE BRADY** following his summer release from Burnley.

Watford announced the signing of goalkeeper **MADUKA OKOYE** from Sparta Rotterdam, where he will remain on loan before moving to Vicarage Road at the end of the season.

New Hornet...Maduka Okoye

Premier League return...Steven Gerrard

Gerrard and Conte join stellar cast of Premier League managers

Steven Gerrard took his first steps as a Premier League manager after leaving Rangers for Aston Villa. The 41-year-old left Glasgow having won last season's Scottish Premiership undefeated, and becomes the latest big-name coach in the English top flight, following the arrival of Antonio Conte at Tottenham Hotspur just days earlier.

The Italian's arrival brings the number of managers in the English top flight to have won one of Europe's top five league titles to six, with Jurgen Klopp, Pep Guardiola, Thomas Tuchel, Rafa Benitez, Claudio Ranieri and Conte lifting 22 between them.

Aston Villa right-back **MATTY CASH** was called up to represent Poland after he successfully applied for Polish citizenship.

Former Ukraine coach **ANDRIY SHEVCHENKO** took his first job in club football, joining Serie A side Genoa as Davide Ballardini's replacement. Elsewhere, **STEFANO COLANTUONO** replaced Fabrizio Castori at Salernitana.

FLORIAN KOHFELDT, who oversaw Werder Bremen's relegation from last season's Bundesliga, was appointed by Wolfsburg to replace Dutchman Mark van Bommel.

Former Blackburn, Chelsea, Fulham, Newcastle and Republic of Ireland winger **DAMIEN DUFF** took charge of League of Ireland side Shelbourne, his first senior managerial role.

Swiss outfit Lausanne-Sport completed the free transfer of ex-Sunderland defender **LAMINE KONE** following his release by Strasbourg in the summer.

AFRICA

Ahead of AFCON 2021, two players switched their international allegiances. London-born Leicester ace **ADEMOLA LOOKMAN** declared for Nigeria, and former France youth international **PAPE GUEYE** will play for Senegal.

CONCACAF

IKE UGBO, who left Chelsea to join Genk last summer, has committed his international future to Canada.

Ugbo...new Canucks star

"He means everything to a lot of folk, myself included. He was my boss, my coach, my second father and then turned into one of my best friends. The loss is absolutely incredible"

Ally McCoist led the tributes to Walter Smith on *talkSPORT*

Appointments, sackings and loans

OUT

Fired...Mick McCarthy

EUROPE

Liverpool announced that director **MICHAEL EDWARDS** will leave the club this summer, the man widely credited with much of the Reds' transfer business over recent years.

A number of EFL managers left their jobs, including **NIGEL ADKINS** (Charlton Athletic), **MICK McCARTHY** (Cardiff City), **MARKUS SCHOPP** (Barnsley), **NEIL COX** (Scunthorpe United) and **DAVE CHALLINOR** (Hartlepool United).

Birmingham City were forced to cancel the loan of Manchester United winger **TAHITH CHONG** after a serious groin injury, while the Blues also released midfielder **ADAM CLAYTON**.

ASIA

Kuwait SC terminated the contract of **JOHN OBI MIKEL** just four months after signing the former Chelsea man.

Injured...Tahith Chong

CONCACAF

Austin FC defender **MATT BESLER** announced his retirement after 13 years in MLS. Elsewhere, Houston Dynamo sacked manager **TAB RAMOS**, while Chicago Fire oversaw a clear-out by releasing seven players including forward Robert Beric, midfielder Elliot Collier and defender Francisco Calvo.

The managerial merry-go-round

More Premier League managers have been sacked in 2021-22 than the whole of last season. The departures of Steve Bruce (Newcastle), Nuno Espirito Santo (Tottenham), Daniel Farke (Norwich) and Dean Smith (Aston Villa), along with Xisco Munoz (Watford), took the tally to five for the campaign, compared with just four last term.

Sacked... Nuno Espirito Santo

OBITUARIES

Walter SMITH (1948-2021)
In two spells as Rangers manager, Smith led the club to ten top-flight league titles, five Scottish Cups and six League Cups. He remains the club's second-most successful manager after Bill Struth.

Either side of those spells, he spent four years at Everton and two with Scotland, almost guiding them to Euro 2008.

Smith became coach of Scotland U18s in 1978 and the U21s in 1982. He was also assistant manager for Jim McLean's successful Dundee United, then went to the World Cup as Alex Ferguson's assistant in 1986 before joining Graeme Souness at Rangers later that summer.

Keir Radnedge

Winner... Walter Smith

Luigi MALDERA (1946-2021)
Milan defender who won the European Cup and Intercontinental Cup in 1969.

Bernardo TENGARRINHA (1989-2021)
A former Portugal youth international who played for Olhanense, Vitoria Setubal and Boavista, Tengarrinha was forced to retire in 2017 having been diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma.

Umberto COLOMBO (1933-2021)
Italy midfielder who won three Serie A titles in four seasons for Juventus.

Aleksandar SHALAMANOV (1941-2021)
After Shalamanov's death at the end of October, Slavia Sofia announced that they would rename their stadium after him.

Alongside his football career, the Bulgarian also competed as an alpine skier at the 1960 Winter Olympics and was part of the volleyball squad at the summer Games in 1964. He played over 260 games for Slavia and won 42 caps for Bulgaria, playing at two World Cups.

World Cup winner... Ron Flowers in 1963

Dragan PANTELIC (1951-2021)
Yugoslavia goalkeeper at the 1980 Olympics and 1982 World Cup, known for scoring penalties. In total he netted over 20 career goals for club (Radnicki Nis and Bordeaux) and country.

Ron FLOWERS (1934-2021)
Midfielder Flowers was a non-playing member of England's 1966 World Cup-winning squad, earning 49 caps for his country. He also made 515 appearances for Wolves between 1952 and 1967.

Gerald SINSTADT (1930-2021)
One of the defining voices of British sport in the 20th century, Sinstadt commentated at four World Cups from 1970 to 1982.

His voice became synonymous with some of the most iconic moments of the 1970s, including Denis Law's backheel against Manchester United in 1974, and Liverpool's European Cup comeback against Saint-Etienne three years later.

More importantly, he was among the first people to call out and condemn the racist chanting against black players that was so prevalent during that era.

Algeria

North African side are in record-breaking form ahead of January's Africa Cup of Nations finals

Despite not being a household name on the international scene, the Algerian national team have been quietly going about their business. Within the camp, many believe they are on the cusp of something very special.

When Djamel Belmadi took the job in 2018, not many expected him to lose just one game in his first three years. Since a defeat against Benin in October of that year, the Desert Foxes have gone a whopping 31 games unbeaten, setting a new African record, and are now looking to break Italy's world record of 37.

This unbeaten run has had many twist and turns, but included many remarkable results along the way. A 3-0 thrashing of Colombia in Lille proved that this side have not just what it takes on African soil, but on the world stage too.

The decision, in March 2019, to abolish the Confederations Cup left many fans disappointed, as this was seen as a massive opportunity to prove Algeria's worth on the big stage. A 2-2 draw with Mexico (with ten men for the majority of the game) showed the team's grit and determination. Nonetheless, Algeria have also faced Senegal twice, Nigeria twice, Tunisia twice, Mali twice and Ivory Coast without suffering a defeat, bolstering their name as the African champions and the continent's dominant team.

Algeria will be the favourites for the upcoming Africa Cup of Nations, looking to retain the title for the first time in their history, two-and-a-half years after lifting the trophy in Egypt. The bulk of the team is still the same, with new additions such as Said Benrahma of West Ham United and Ramiz Zerrouki of Twente looking to inject some much needed youth into the side. The Algerian Football Federation are also working on getting new players on board, such as Luca Zidane (son of Zinedine) and Rayan Ait-Nouri (Wolverhampton Wanderers left-back) in time for the tournament.

With a current back four that boasts players from Nice, Villarreal and Borussia Monchengladbach, many of the top attacking talent in Africa will find it difficult to break this back-line down. After all, Algeria conceded just one goal from open play, and only two in total, at the previous AFCON.

World Cup qualification is progressing nicely with 19 goals scored in the first four games, and a place in Qatar looking like a real possibility. The competition will be like a home tournament for Algeria with it taking place in the Middle East, where Algerians are expected to sell out the grounds for their matches. Many see the team reaching the quarter-final stage as a minimum requirement.

Key players such as Rais M'Bolhi, Djamel Benlamri and Youcef Belaili play their football in the Middle East already, acclimatising them to the conditions and playing surfaces ahead of the biggest footballing spectacle.

> The Desert Foxes have gone a whopping 31 games unbeaten, setting a new African record, and are now looking to break Italy's world record of 37

There are several players that Algeria have missed out on over the past few years, with the likes of Nabil Fekir and Houssem Aouar opting to play for France, but this has not left the team downhearted. The emergence of Riyad Mahrez, first lifting the Premier League title with Leicester City and then with Manchester City, leaves a real stature and presence in the Algerian dressing room and he leads the team by example, as demonstrated by 25 goals in 68 caps, placing him joint-fifth on the country's list of record scorers.

While Mahrez dominates the headlines, there are other unsung heroes in the team. Ismael Bennacer, who was signed by Arsene Wenger at Arsenal when he was a teenager, has become a key player for Milan. His tenacity, ball retention and passing was crucial in the AFCON 2019 and led to him being named the Player of the Tournament. Youcef Belaili is idolised by the Algerian community and, despite plying his trade in Qatar, he is one of the most skilful players outside of Europe. Youcef Atal's attacking runs from right-back and link-up play with Mahrez down the right-hand side will

ABOVE: Holders... Algeria are hoping to retain their AFCON title in January

Key man... Milan midfielder Ismael Bennacer

be vital to the team's performance, providing the Nice man can steer clear of injury.

The team blends together uniquely with footballers – whom were born in several countries such as France, Algeria and the Netherlands – playing throughout Europe, Africa and Asia.

The scary thing is that Algeria have not even been playing at their best. Underwhelming playing surfaces in Africa and immense temperatures have all been difficult factors to deal with, hence why the Africa Cup of Nations was moved from the summer back to January. Although it is very challenging for a North African side to win the trophy in sub-Saharan Africa, if anyone can do it it's this Algeria side.

While only local players will go to the FIFA Arab Cup in November and December (a dress-rehearsal for the 2022 World Cup) – where they have been drawn in a group with Egypt, Lebanon and Sudan – the AFCON remains the biggest test for *Les Verts*.

Dean Ammi

Ohi Omoijuanfo

This season's unlikely contender for the European Golden Shoe

At the start of November, the leading contender for the 2021-22 ESM Golden Shoe was not Cristiano Ronaldo, Robert Lewandowski or Lionel Messi, but a 27-year-old striker playing for Molde in the Norwegian top flight: Ohi Omoijuanfo, a Norway international with Nigerian roots.

Scandinavian-based players topping the Golden Shoe charts is not uncommon at this time year. The early, summer-time start of the Norwegian top flight and pre-Christmas conclusion means that the league's top scorers have a head start over the rest of Europe, but by the turn of the year their records have usually been beaten.

> "Getting chances is the first step, scoring them is the next. What you see this year is the result"
>
> **Ohi Omoijuanfo**

Omoijuanfo, however, will have the opportunity to add to his tally when he joins Serbian giants Red Star Belgrade as a free agent in January.

Born in Oslo, he started his professional career at Lillestrom, scoring on his debut to become one of the youngest scorers in Eliteserien history at the age of 16 years and 300 days.

He joined Molde in 2019, and won the title in his first year. In July, he agreed to a three-year deal to move to Serbia, before producing the most prolific season of his career.

"The high number of goals of this year is a consequence of a process of trusting," he tells *World Soccer*. "I've received a lot of criticism in the past years for missing too many chances, but I always kept thinking positive.

"Getting chances is the first step, scoring them is the next. What you see this year is the result".

The Golden Shoe rankings takes the number of goals scored by a player and multiplies it by a value depending on the strength of the league that he plays in. Goals in both Norway and Serbia are worth 1.5 points, so Omoijuanfo's tally of 24 goals in his first 22 games gave him 36 points. If he continues to score at the same rate for his new club, he could be the first player from outside the big five leagues (where goals are worth two points) to win the trophy since Mario Jardel for Sporting in 2001-02.

The player, however, remains realistic about his chances: "I don't think about that at all. I just want to help my team win the league and get better and better.

"Who will win the Golden Boot? That's a tough question. There are a lot of great goalscorers. I think it can be anyone between Mohamed Salah, Erling Haaland, Lewandowski, Messi or Ronaldo".

The more realistic objective is to be successful in Norway: "Many people don't believe me when I say it, but I want to win the league more than I want to be the top goalscorer," he says. "But of course, if I can do both, it would be amazing."

The 27-year-old won his first and only cap for Norway against Sweden in 2017. After four years, in the form of his life, he is hoping for another chance: "I was actually with them during the [October] national break, but unfortunately I didn't get to play," he says. "The competition is tough, with strikers like Haaland, [Alexander] Sorloth and Joshua King. But I'd love to join the national team again."

Emanuele Giulianelli

In form... Omoijuanfo

Daniel Maldini

The son of Paolo and grandson of Cesare is the latest Maldini to make his mark for Milan

Ten years ago, during a UEFA TV report on Milan legend, Paolo Maldini, his former team-mate, Clarence Seedorf, was asked about the possibility that either of Maldini's two sons, Christian or Daniel, might follow in their recently retired father's footsteps: "It's in their genes. I would say that they have talent, especially the little one [ten-year-old Daniel]," responded Seedorf.

Now, that prophecy is beginning to look good. In his third season with Milan, Daniel Maldini seems set to add another chapter to the fabulous story of the club and the "Maldini Dynasty". When Daniel came on as a substitute in Milan's 3-1 defeat to Juventus last January, it marked the 1,000th Serie A game that a Maldini had played in for Milan. Daniel was making his sixth league appearance that day (Paolo notched up 647 games and grandfather Cesare 347). You could say that, at Milan, a Maldini is forever.

For now, the 20-year-old Maldini is a fringe player, but is arguably on the cusp of what could be an important career.

Cynics might suggest that he has got to where he is not only because of his ultra famous name but also because of the fact that Paolo is currently technical director at Milan. Yet goals against Spezia in a September 2-1 Serie A win (his first league start), and also for Italy Under-20s in an October 1-1 draw with England, would suggest that Daniel Maldini is on his way.

September 2021, incidentally, would look like an important month for the young Maldini given that it also marked his Champions League debut, against Liverpool on the hallowed turf of Anfield.

La Repubblica football writer, Enrico Curro, argues that not only does young Maldini appear to have every possibility of making it, he also points out that his famous surname is probably more of an encumbrance than a help at this point.

When your father just happens to have been many people's idea of the perfect left-back, and when both father and grandfather have captained your club to European Cup success, lifting 33 titles for Milan between them, then the bar has been set pretty high.

When both father and grandfather have captained your club to European Cup success, lifting 33 titles for Milan between them, then the bar has been set pretty high

Unlike his father, Daniel is not a defender; rather his best position would seem to be that of attacking midfielder. His aggression, mobility and work rate have all impressed observers. Yet, he will have his work cut out to find a place in the present Milan team, which has been flying high in Serie A for much of this autumn.

If we accept that either the iconic Zlatan Ibrahimovic or Olivier Giroud will lead the attack on their own up front, then there are a lot of contenders in the current squad to play behind them – Portuguese ace Rafael Leao, Belgian Alexis Saelemaekers, Croat Ante Rebic, Bosnian Rade Krunic and Spaniards Samu Castillejo and Brahim Diaz, to name the most obvious.

Young *Azzurrini*... Maldini on his Italy Under-20 debut

It could be that Daniel Maldini's best way forward at this point would be to be loaned out to another smaller club, perhaps in Serie B, where he would get games and pick up a lot of experience. That is often the Italian way with talented youngsters. Indeed, his older brother Christian, who graduated from the club's academy in 2016, spent half a season on loan at Brescia, before sliding down the leagues.

However, the sense is that that will not be the way for Daniel. Unlike Christian, he has already made an impression on the Milan first team, and the idea of him playing for another Italian club seems almost heretical.

Admittedly, Daniel's start has not been quite as explosive as his father's was. Having played just once in the 1984-85 season, Paolo went straight

Dynasty... Daniel Maldini

into the first team as a 17-year-old in the following campaign, and remained there for the next 25 years. By the time Azeglio Vicini's Italy got to the European Championship in West Germany in 1988, Maldini was an automatic first choice at left-back.

Even in the late 1990s, when Cesare was national team coach and Paolo was his team captain, they both handled the situation with huge subtlety and tact. Nobody could accuse Cesare of continually selecting Paolo because he was his son.

The experience of Christian demonstrates that it takes more than a famous surname to make it at the San Siro. The defender failed to make a first-team appearance for Milan, and now plays in Serie C.

If and when Daniel makes it as a player, it will be thanks to his own talent, not that "heavy" family name.

Paddy Agnew

Hwang Hee-Chan

The forward's early-season form has helped rebuild his reputation in his home country

Hwang Hee-Chan's early success in the English Premier League with Wolverhampton Wanderers has been greeted with delight in the Black Country. The exploits of the 25 year-old forward have also gone down well back in South Korea, though eyebrows have gone up a little too.

When representing the national team Hwang has promised much but has yet to show the kind of clinical side in front of goal that brought four goals in his first six appearances in England's top tier. Few have been in any doubt that he has the necessary tools to succeed – "The Bull" is strong, fast, two-footed, intelligent and hard-working, but it has never quite come together on a consistent basis.

In truth, Hwang has been a frustrating figure in the international arena. The defining moment in his career so far had been his appearance as a second-half substitute in the famous 2-0 win over Germany at the 2018 World Cup, only to be taken off again just 20 minutes later.

Perhaps it does not help that Asian fans have never seen him play week in, week out, as his professional career has taken place entirely in Europe. In that sense, Hwang's route to the top tier of English football is similar to that of Son Heung-Min: Hwang was born in the same city as the Tottenham Hotspur star as his father was temporarily working in Chunchon, famous for spicy chicken and beautiful lakes. Both went to Europe as teenagers. Learning to survive and then prosper so young, so far from home in a very different culture is something that should not be underestimated. Many other talented players head west at a similar age but quickly head back and are never seen outside their homelands again.

Son went to Hamburg as a teenager. Hwang headed to Austria after a solid football education in South Korea where he attended Pohang's Jecheol Middle and High School, establishments with close links to Pohang Steelers, three time champions of Asia.

The baroque architecture and prettiness of Salzburg was quite a change from Pohang, a gritty city dominated by the POSCO steelworks. It took time to settle in Europe but, after a loan spell in the lower leagues, Hwang started to make waves in the Alpine city in the 2016-17 season when he managed 16 goals. In total he netted 45 times and provided 29 assists in 126 appearances, winning four league titles and three cups. His goal against Liverpool at Anfield in the Champions League brought him to the attention of the English media and fans but Wolves had already checked out the player. In July 2020, however, he signed for RB Leipzig.

His time in Germany was not a success, although getting a serious bout of COVID-19 early on did not help. He lost confidence and, by his own admission, was not at his best when he did play, which was increasingly infrequent due to the stiff competition at the club. Then came August's loan move to Wolves.

An early goal against Watford was welcome but there was a brace to come against Newcastle United and a goal at Leeds United. In a side that has struggled to score, Hwang's contribution has been heralded, as has his combination play with Raul Jimenez. It is perhaps not surprising that he has got more minutes for the national team since his English move. It is known that South Korea coach Paulo Bento was in favour of the switch to the Premier League and a link-up with another Portuguese boss, Bruno Lage.

Fans back in Korea will be watching to see if Hwang Hee-Chan can maintain his great start for Wolves but, more importantly, whether he can start fulfilling his potential on the international stage too.

John Duerden

Impact...Hwang celebrates scoring his fourth league goal of the season

Josip Stanisic

Promising defender the latest in long line of foreign-born Croatian internationals

Bayern Munich defender Josip Stanisic has quickly established himself as a key man in the Croatian national team. Having made his debut in the 3-0 victory against Cyprus in October, he announced himself as the country's right-back "for the next ten years," according to head coach Zlatko Dalic. A versatile player, he has proven himself to be outstanding in one-on-one duels and useful in offensive actions.

Right-back has been a sore point for Croatia since the end of the 2018 World Cup. Sime Vrsaljko was first choice in Russia, but severely injured his knee ligaments shortly afterwards and was absent from the national team for almost two years. Meanwhile, Kieran Trippier has kept him out of the Atletico Madrid team, but in Stanisic Croatia have "an extraordinary solution", says Dalic.

The 21-year-old was born in Munich to Croatian parents. He started out in 1860 Munich's academy, before moving across Bavaria to join Furstenfeldbruck. In 2017, he was spotted by scouts from Bayern Munich, and signed by Germany's biggest club.

Niko Kovac, another German-born Croatian international, took a shine to the young defender during his time as Bayern's head coach, and took him to America on the club's pre-season tour in 2018. His Bundesliga debut came under Hansi Flick in April, starting at left-back in a 1-1 draw with Union Berlin.

In July he signed his first professional deal, keeping him at the club until 2023. However, shortly after Julian Nagelsmann took charge in the summer, the young Croatian signed another extension to 2025.

"Stanisic is a very reliable player. He proved himself in his initial performances, so we decided to extend his contract," said his new coach. Nagelsmann demonstrated his faith in Stanisic by throwing him into the first XI after first-choice right-back Benjamin Pavard picked up an injury.

Impressive...Stanisic has been a regular in Bayern Munich's defence this season

"I am grateful to Bayern and its people for their trust, I did not hesitate for a moment," said Stanisic after penning the new deal. "I am privileged by the fact that I train under the leadership of Nagelsmann, and together with such top-quality players, I will continue playing in a Bayern jersey with all my heart and knowledge. It is my obligation to give my best in forthcoming matches for Bayern."

> "Stanisic is a very reliable player. He proved himself in his initial performances, so we decided to extend his contract"
>
> **Bayern coach Julian Nagelsmann**

There have been plenty of notable landmarks along the way: Stanisic started in Bayern's 3-1 victory over Borussia Dortmund in the German Super Cup, and made his European debut in the 3-0 Champions League demolition of Barcelona, before making another substitute appearance and assisting the final goal in a 4-0 away victory over Benfica in Lisbon.

As his profile increased, a tug-of-war over his international future began, with his agent Dieter Hoeness encouraging him to represent the country of his birth. Despite making two appearances for Germany's Under-19s, Stanisic accepted a call-up for Croatia's Under-21s in August, and a place in the senior squad duly followed.

"Everybody in our family agreed to accept the invitation of the coach Dalic," said Stanisic. His parents' influence was clear. For his 18th birthday, they presented him with the chequered red and white jersey of the Croatian national team. Slavonia, the

International impact...Stanisic made his Croatia debut in October

region of Croatia that his parents hail from, has also produced internationals Mario Mandzukic and Ivica Olic, both of them former Bayern players.

"My dreams are fulfilled now...my family is satisfied, my sister Leona cried with happiness," he added.

After his debut in Cyprus – and his second start three days later, a 2-2 home draw with Slovakia – there were celebrations in the village of Malino, where his father was born.

Bayern are just as optimistic about the player's future. After tying him down to his new contract, sports director Hasan Salihamidzic said: "Josip has progressed, he is a win for Bayern. He is strong in a duel, he can create pressure forward in offensive actions. And a very important thing: he gives his best in each and every training session."

Stanisic is not the first foreign-born talent to have been picked up by Croatia's scouts. As well as Niko and Robert Kovac, Ivan Klasnic was also born in Germany, while Josip Simunic (Australia), Ivan Rakitic (Switzerland) and Mateo Kovacic (Austria) have all become key men for the national team.

"We took care of Stanisic, just as we follow other potential candidates for the national team," said Petar Krpan, chief instructor of HNS, the Croatian Football Federation. "We have to work secretly to avoid the pressure of clubs to opt for other national teams."

In July, legendary goalkeeper Stipe Pletikosa was appointed technical director, tasked with searching for young players of Croatian origin and roots in other countries. The existing scouting departments have expanded and the early results have been encouraging, with contact made with a number of young footballers. Gabriel Vidovic, another promising, Bavarian-born youngster from Bayern's academy, recently made his debut for the U21s, while brothers Leon and Noah Pesch of Bayer Leverkusen may join next.

"Croatia and Croatians nurture the cult of the national football team, and it is of great honour for me and everyone, especially for the parents of these young players to appear for our national team," Pletikosa stated.

Zdravko Reic

Mohamed Aboutrika

The Egyptian legend is living in exile, having been branded a "terrorist" by his home country

Mohamed Aboutrika is generally acknowledged as the best African footballer to have never played in Europe, and certainly Egypt's finest player until Mohamed Salah came along.

For a decade, between 2003 and 2013, he was the heart of the success of Egypt's national team and the fabled Cairo club Al Ahly, earning hero-like status. He was a driving midfielder with a gait similar to that of Zinedine Zidane, gliding across the turf, distributing touches of finesse or finishing with deadly accuracy.

It is this popularity that now condemns him to a life in exile, and living in fear of his life as Egypt's iron-fisted military government look to crush any possible challenge to their rule.

He has been branded a "terrorist" in his home country, a charge few on the streets give any credence to, and faces imprisonment if he were to return home.

As a philosophy graduate, Aboutrika was always different from the average footballer, using his status to highlight causes, like that of the children of Gaza when he scored for Egypt in the 2008 Africa Cup of Nations finals and used the television coverage to unveil a T-shirt with the words: "Sympathize with Gaza".

He was also an ardent supporter of the Al Ahly Ultras, who were among those at the forefront of the Tahrir Square uprising in Cairo in the Arab Spring ten years ago. It led to the toppling of long-standing Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak and his generals, and the country's first democratic elections in 2012.

But when the government of Mohamed Morsi lasted a year before the military took over again, Aboutrika found himself on the wrong side of the political debate, accused of being a supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood and even financing the group.

While Aboutrika has consistently denied this, he had his assets in Egypt frozen and his passport revoked, and was later added onto a terrorist watch list, forcing him to flee to Qatar ahead of a travel ban.

There he has kept up his profile as a pundit on the pan-Arab satellite channels, while trying to legally challenge his status in Egypt and earn the right to go home.

He was successful in an appeal to the courts to have his name taken off the terror list, but then it was re-imposed again. His latest bid just months ago to clear his name was rejected; an unsurprising verdict given the courts are not independent and Egyptian authorities remain concerned about his popular appeal.

Back in February, when Al Ahly competed at the Club World Cup in Doha, Aboutrika was stopped from visiting his old club and when he did shake hands with some players in the stands at one of their games, the players were fined for "breaking COVID-19 regulations".

This pettiness from the Egyptian authorities has been hard to swallow, but in Doha the 43-year-old Aboutrika keeps a discreet presence, careful to steer clear of political issues. But with the World Cup now less than a year away, he could yet prove a major embarrassment for the autocrats in Cairo as his plight is sure to attract further publicity.

Mark Gleeson

Outspoken...a mural in the Gaza strip depicts the moment Aboutrika unveiled a pro-Gaza T-shirt

eye witness

Lukas Vrablik reports

SLOVAKIA

MSK Zilina's exceptional academy

If you travel to Zilina, a city with 81,000 inhabitants in north Slovakia, and watch a game at the Stadion pod Dubnom, it's very likely that you will see a future international or two.

The academy of local club, MSK Zilina, is considered to be the best in Slovakia, and one of the best in the region. Over the past decade, Zilina have produced a number of Slovakian internationals, including Milan Skriniar (Internazionale), Martin Dubravka

Champions League...Zilina faced Chelsea in 2010

Stadion pod Dubnom...home of MSK Zilina

(Newcastle United), Laszlo Benes (Borussia Monchengladbach), Robert Bozenik (Fortuna Dusseldorf) and David Hancko (Sparta Prague). Simply put, no team in the country is better at developing young players.

In the past, they chased silverware – winning six league titles between 2001 and 2012 – and qualified for the group stage of the Europa League in 2008-09 and the Champions League in 2010-11. At that time, their squad was made up of experienced Slovakian players with a smattering of imports, particularly from Africa or the Balkans.

Prior to the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, Zilina were not among the country's top clubs. Their biggest success came in 1982, when they won the Slovak National League – then the second tier.

But by the late 1990s and early 2000s the club had started to grow under the leadership of local politician Jan Slota, one of the most powerful men in the newly-established Slovakia.

Slota then sold the club to Jozef Antosik, a local businessman who had made his fortune in the paper industry, and with his investments Zilina quickly became one of the biggest teams in the country.

Jan Jasenka, a journalist at website *Sport.sk*, has followed Zilina since his youth and saw the club growing: "I was born there and went to every game as a child. It was a mid-table side but they started fighting for the trophies, especially after Antosik came in.

"The peak was the Champions League groups in 2010. Zilina built talented and experienced players, and it paid off," he tells *World Soccer*.

The club's philosophy is different now. Zilina have transformed into a club whose priority is to develop players. Their brave strategy looks like an example for other clubs, especially in Europe's smaller leagues, and shows how football can become sustainable outside the elite.

Due to a lack of sponsorship, TV rights or matchday revenues, many clubs rely on rich investors or money from European competitions. Zilina decided to sell players – and they look to be better at it than anyone else. "They try to implement a system which would be independent of sponsors, but at the same time to earn as much money as they can in order to cover the costs," Jasenka explains.

According to a report by the CIES Football Observatory, with an average age of 21.1 years, they had the second-youngest team in Europe during the 2020-21 season, just behind Latvian side FK Metta (19.9). Despite many inexperienced players, Zilina finished the season in fourth place and qualified for the UEFA Conference League.

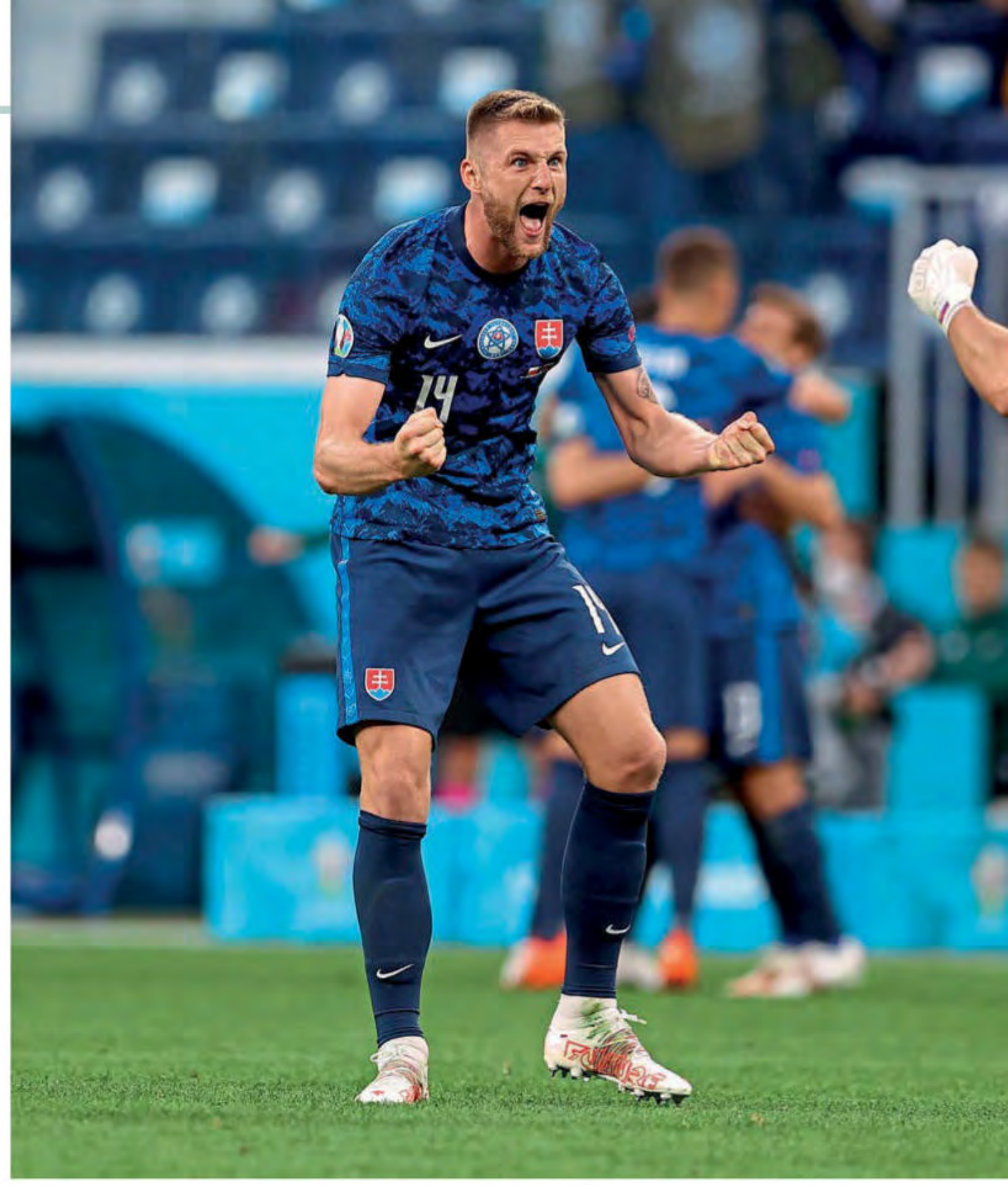
The young team impressed in Europe, playing an attractive brand of football with quick transitions to see off Georgian side Dila Gori, Apollon Limassol of Cyprus and Tobol Kostanay from Kazakhstan. In their home game against the latter, a 5-0 victory, their oldest player was 24-year-old defender Jan Minarik, and every other player was born in 1998 or later.

Apollon coach Alexander Zorniger compared Zilina's playing style to RB Leipzig, where he worked before. "They try to play quickly, have a lot of young players and I see a clear plan behind it," he said.

Inexperience eventually cost them, as they lost 8-1 on aggregate to Czech side Jablonec in the next round, although this came after top scorer Dawid Kurminowski had been sold to Aarhus, and midfielder Jan Bernat had joined Westerlo on loan.

After a five-game winless run, coach Pavol Stano was sacked and replaced by his former assistant Peter Cernak. Cernak had worked with the club's youth teams and B team and knows the club's philosophy well, a crucial attribute for a head coach at Zilina.

Zilina aren't the only team in Slovakia with a clear transfer philosophy. Trencin used a model of getting undervalued players from Netherlands, Latin America or West Africa, improving them and selling them on to Western Europe. Through this approach, they won back-to-back titles in 2014-15 and 2015-16,



Graduates...Slovakia internationals Milan Skriniar and Martin Dubravka celebrate

> "Zilina are focused on the academy. When they sell their best players, they don't buy new ones, they just fill the squad with inexperienced youngsters… essentially they have become a football farm"
>
> **Jan Jasenka, local journalist**

by which time their progressive coach Adrian Gul'a was poached by Zilina.

Zilina have sought to adopt a similar philosophy to Trencin, but with a greater focus on selling their own academy products rather than imports.

That is the basis of the plan to compete with Slovan Bratislava, the country's richest club and winner of the last three league titles. Slovan can afford to invest in more experienced and expensive players from abroad, yet Zilina actually ended up as a financially stronger club in the 2018-2019 season according to a Deloitte report. Their revenue was over €12 million, mostly driven by players' sales, which accounted for more than 60 per cent of the budget. That year, Zilina sold David Hancko to Fiorentina and Samuel Mraz to Empoli.

"Zilina are focused on the academy. When they sell their best players, they don't buy new ones, they just fill the squad with inexperienced youngsters. Basically, it's now the club's DNA," adds Jasenka. "However, that also means that Zilina can't fight for the title or Europe every year, and sporting achievements are in the shadow of a business plan. The squad is changed very often, so it cannot compete with the biggest teams.

"Zilina have essentially become a football farm. Fans who grew up in the period of success at the start of the century can be sad about it, but football is changing."

Zilina have the advantage of a top-class academy, as indicated by another recent report by CIES. With 42 academy graduates playing in Europe's top-flight leagues, they were tied with Red Bull Salzburg and Standard Liege as the continent's 21st most productive academy. Only one club from Central Europe, Sparta Prague, were above them.

Jaroslav Bacik, head of MSK Zilina's academy, explains the main characteristics of the Zilina player: "From the lowest age categories in the academy, we want to play in the same system. We want our players to fulfil the requirements of our style, essentially as a side based on attacking philosophy.

"We want to have quality individuals, who at the same time would be willing to do collective work in the 4-3-3 system. The final product of a player, who gets from the academy to the A-team, has to be technically skilful, and have the necessary physical attributes for his position."

Young guns...the club's approach is paying dividends
Credit: Instagram @mskzilina

The club has around 300 players from the Under-6 to Under-19 age groups and tries to find the best young players not only in the city's surroundings, but across Slovakia.

"Until Under-13, we only scout the region of Zilina, and try to select local players with potential. They still have to attend a primary school, so we focus on the area about 30km around Zilina," adds Bacik. "Above U13, players are accommodated in nearby Strazov. In the U16 and U17 categories we watch them with an emphasis on their potential, which should be to be able to get at least into our A-team."

The next step – to get their youth products into senior football – is at the basis of Zilina's strategy. "No player was ever sold from the bench," Bacik says. "They have to be given opportunity, and we give them opportunities. When a player is prepared technically, tactically and physically, we provide them with a chance in senior football. The youth development system is very important in that regard.

"We also have a joint B-team and U19 side, who train together during the week. At the weekend, they are separated into B-team [playing in the second tier] and U19 team, according to their quality."

Zilina believe developing and selling is the best way to do the business. As matchday revenues and fans' interest are low – a common story across post-communist Europe – transfers are the way to become sustainable, even at the expense of sporting success.

Like many countries, the vulnerable finances of Slovakian football were exposed by COVID. Zilina acted fast – owner Antosik put the club into liquidation and released most of their experienced players.

According to Slovakian trade law, a process of liquidation doesn't have to lead to a company's end, so Zilina could continue in the Slovak league, with a younger team. As a result, the club saved money and were able to rebuild the team at the same time.

With hindsight, their plan, borne out of crisis, looks visionary: young players led the club into Europe. It's unlikely that the strategy will change any time soon.

eye witness

Mark Gleeson reports

GAMBIA

From refugees to AFCON stars

The last thing on Ebrima Darboe's mind as he waited, stuck in Libya trying to hustle for a place on a boat to Europe, was playing football.

It had been six months since he had left his home in The Gambia, where there was not enough food to feed the family and where his mother and three siblings were struggling to survive.

His father had died and, although only 14 years old, he had little choice but to try to strike out for a better life, one where he might not only have opportunities and choice but also one that would allow him to eventually be able to provide for his family back in Bakoteh.

He and two friends had caught a bus first, and then vehicle after vehicle as a journey north merged from days into weeks and then months.

As he sat in a detention camp in Libya, where abuse and violence was rife, he

Refugee footballer... Roma midfielder Ebrima Darboe

QATAR
AIRWAYS
ROMA
55

Kalifa Manneh...in action for former club Catania

wondered whether it was worth it. But he had no option but to try to push on.

This was just six years ago. Like so many from his country, and indeed across West Africa, a hazardous, life-threatening boat journey across the Mediterranean is the last resort of the desperate. Traffickers prey on their vulnerability and they are forced to put their lives in the hands of the unscrupulous.

But Darboe made it across to Sicily and as an unaccompanied minor came under the protection of SPRAR (*Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati* – the Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees), an agency of Italy's interior ministry. A family was found to look after him in Rieti, where his life returned to a semblance of normality and he was able to find delight in kicking a ball again.

> "It was hard, I thank God and Italy…I came from a long and hard journey but it changed my life"
> Ebrima Darboe

Now he is just a month away from the pinnacle of the African game, playing for the country of his birth at the Africa Cup of Nations finals having completed a circuitous route to the top that is a testament to his strength, endurance and determination.

Gambia will be making their debut, and Darboe and two team-mates will be part of the adventure – a prospect that would have seemed like pure fantasy during the arduous route they were forced to take to reach Europe.

"I had the dream since I was a child, but in Africa it's difficult to play at a high level unless you have help," says Darboe.

"There was a friend who encouraged me, who told me I was strong and needed to get to Europe but there was no chance to get a visa."

He does not dwell long on the journey. "It was hard, I thank God and Italy. They welcomed me, put me in SPRAR and I want to thank them. As everyone knows, I had a somewhat particular story. I came from a long and hard journey but it changed my life."

All smiles...Musa Juwara after scoring at the San Siro

Gambia coach... Tom Saintfiet

Roma had a scout who spotted him early, but they were unable to sign him until Darboe was granted refugee status in another protracted process. But last October he got papers that made travel possible, and received a first call-up from his country. In May he played for an hour in the semi-final of the Europa League against Manchester United and finished the season with seven Serie A appearances.

Gambia handed him a first cap in June as they began their Cup of Nations preparations with a series of friendlies in Turkey after which Darboe had his first chance to go home, accompanied by his agent.

Darboe's story is matched by at least two others, who are also playing in Italy after arriving as boat refugees.

Winger Kalifa Manneh has a similar tale, as does Musa Juwara. All three should play some part for the Gambia at the finals in Cameroon.

Juwara was also 14 when he travelled by boat across to Italy, got a chance to play for the local village team where he first stayed and was then adopted by the family of the coach at Virtus Avigliano, who he helped win their regional championship.

After clearing a legal hurdle over his migrant status, he went to Chievo Verona, then Bologna for a reported €500,000 fee and scored a dream first Serie A goal against Internazionale. He is now on loan at Crotone.

Manneh landed at Siracusa, found a home in the village of Torre del Grifo and got a trial at Catania and was nurtured under the tutelage of former Italy international Walter Novellino, then coaching at the Sicilian club. Manneh has now moved up a division to Serie B at Perugia and has been a member of the Gambia squad for some two years now.

Playing for the national team allows them the opportunity to go home, arriving almost as conquering heroes back into the bosoms of their families, having conquered the odds to make an improbable breakthrough at the top of the game.

"I was not there when Darboe went home but I know for Manneh, it was emotional. I don't think Juwara has been back yet," says Gambia coach Tom Saintfiet.

"But I'm sure that for many of them, it's special. And most of all, family wise. To make that step, to leave the country at a very young age, with all the risks involved travelling through Africa, and going by boat to Italy, and then making a career in Europe."

Saintfiet is all too aware of the poignant narrative but wants to play down the dramatic tale of refugee turned Nations Cup footballer.

"These are boys who really made huge steps in football through their determination and their will to succeed. And that's fantastic. I also try not to be too involved. I give players a lot of freedom in the beginning of a camp. And it's sometimes also very sensitive. We don't always know the backgrounds. I know that for the international media, the refugee story is very interesting. Actually, it's eye-catching. But I know that many of the players don't like to be reminded about it, because they would rather be known as the quality players that they are."

BAKERY JATTA (Gambia)
Gambia are waiting to see what happens about Bakery Jatta, the Hamburg midfielder who made his Bundesliga debut some four years ago, only to be accused of using a false identity.

He also arrived as a refugee but is now under investigation by German police after newspaper revelations that his real name is Bakary Daffeh and he is older than his reported 23 years. He continues to turn out regularly for Hamburg, now in the second division, and has produced Gambian papers that verify his identity and they have satisfied the German football association but not the police, who raided his home last year. Until there is clarity on his situation, Jatta cannot afford to travel outside of Germany and jeopardise his refugee status. He would likely be an automatic choice for the Scorpions at the Cup of Nations finals but time is running out for him to stake a claim for selection.

KEI KAMARA (Sierra Leone)
Kei Kamara's journey as a child refugee was documented in a moving short film, explaining how he fled Sierra Leone's civil war as a seven-year-old as his school came under fire and classmates were killed. But it took until he was 16 before he was accepted into a US refugee programme that allowed him to reunite with his mother who had left years earlier to seek work across the Atlantic. His schooling had been badly disrupted but he got a chance to go to college on a soccer scholarship and then play in Major League Soccer. Later he got some Premier League exposure with Norwich City, turning him into an instant hero at home. He might well have played for the US but was more than happy to return to Sierra Leone in 2008 for an international debut and has been a feature of their national side ever since, culminating in scoring the decisive goal in June that booked them a place at January's Cup of Nations finals in Cameroon as they beat Benin in their last group match. It will be Sierra Leone's first finals appearance since 1996 and only their third since they first entered the qualifiers in 1974. Since, Kamara has turned 37 and is set for a final swansong on the international stage, moving to HIJK in Finland to stay match fit after his last contract at Minnesota United came to an end. Kamara has been celebrated too for his charity work and efforts to ensure a steady supply of much needed balls and kit are sent to Sierra Leone so kids can play.

Sierra Leone icon...Kei Kamara during his spell in MLS with Colorado Rapids

eyewitness

Ryan Baldi reports

SCOTLAND

The UK's biggest fan-owned club

Unbeaten in their first 11 games of the 2021-22 Scottish Premiership season, their first campaign back in the top flight since being relegated in 2020, Heart of Midlothian could hardly have wished for a brighter start to their era of fan ownership.

The transfer of a majority stake to the fan-backed Foundation of Hearts (FoH) in September this year made the Edinburgh side the biggest fan-owned club in the United Kingdom, a feel-good story of supporter empowerment that has been held up as a beacon of hope to fans of

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HEARTS

other clubs discontent with their own powers that be.

But the remarkable story of Hearts fans' ascent to ownership of their beloved club should not be mistaken as a tale of overnight success. Their grassroots movement has traced a long and tumultuous path.

The club's journey to fan ownership can be traced back to late 2004, when then-chief executive Chris Robinson proposed to sell Tynecastle Park, Hearts' home since 1886, to property developers in an effort to ease grave financial difficulties. Hearts would've then moved across the city to take up residence at Murrayfield, the 67,000-capacity rugby stadium, leasing an arena far too vast for their needs.

Robinson's plan was universally unpopular with fans, who initiated a campaign entitled "Save Our Hearts", leading protests and boycotts, and eventually forcing the club's sale to Lithuanian multimillionaire Vladimir Romanov in 2005.

"I used to go along and listen to the guys who were trying to pull [Save Our Hearts] together," remembers Garry Halliday, a founding director of the Foundations of Hearts. "It was at that time that I came up with an idea that if the fans pledged £5 a week for so many years, they would be able to clear the debt, which was sitting at around £22 million and was the reason we were selling the stadium. Then Vladimir Romanov came rolling into town and things seemed too good to be true, which ultimately they were."

Although Romanov offered salvation for Tynecastle and, for a while, prosperity for Hearts, the Lithuanian proved a capricious and controversial overlord. Romanov's funds and interest soon waned.

"I resurrected the idea a couple of years later with former player Gary Mackay, who's made the most appearances for Hearts," Halliday says.

"The debt was rising by the day and we knew that, if something didn't happen, the club would probably face extinction. The idea was to approach Romanov, get a price for the club, and then take that to the fans and ask them if they were up for setting up a monthly pledge to buy a majority shareholding and take the club into fan ownership, which would stop us being a rich person's plaything ever again.

"We tried with Vladimir a few times, but he never met us. We got a few prices from them. They wanted £50 million, then £60 million, and I think it rose to £70 million. It was pretty ridiculous."

Halliday and his colleagues from the Foundation of Hearts spoke at supporters' clubs meetings and handed out leaflets outside the ground. Pledges of support began to trickle in. When the club went into administration in 2013, FoH's membership shot up by around 5,000.

"We played a game against St. Mirren at Tynecastle," remembers Liam Corbett from Hearts podcast *This Is My Story*. "Everybody who went to that game genuinely thought it was going to be the last game that Hearts would ever play. Players weren't getting paid, staff weren't getting paid, we couldn't afford to police the match. We had no option but to back the Foundation of Hearts. There was no Saudi prince or Russian billionaire coming over to bail us out. That was it. It was going to be gates closed, game over."

"It's always going to be difficult to get a sizeable fan base moving in one direction," adds journalist and Hearts fan Joel Sked. "I think the state the club were in, the fact we were in such financial trouble, it galvanised the support. When it first started gathering momentum and people started pledging, it was a case of, 'OK, this is doable.'"

"When the fans were looking to go somewhere," Halliday says, "we were already set up.

Flying start...Hearts players celebrate their league victory over Celtic in July

"[Local businesswoman] Ann Budge said that if we needed a couple of million pounds to save the club, she would put the money in, as long as there was proof the fans would back the Foundation of Hearts. Then Vladimir Romanov's business empire collapsed, the club went into administration. The club needed £2.5 million to bring it out of administration. She put that in, with the assumption that the fans would pay her the money back. It was originally a five-year plan. We had just over 8,500 fans pledging an average of £16 a month, so it was effectively £1.5 million a year."

Although Budge swooped to save the club from extinction, the points deduction with which Hearts were levied all but sealed relegation to the Championship. Fans raised around £1 million to pay debts and stabilise the club after dropping a tier. Rivals Hibernian had also been relegated and Rangers were in the division, so promotion was deemed unlikely.

"We romped the Championship, won it by 21 points," Halliday reports delightedly. "We were back into the Premiership in one season.

"Ann then approached us to say would we delay paying her back for a further two years to give another

Vladimir Romanov... Hearts' former owner

> "Players weren't getting paid, staff weren't getting paid, we couldn't afford to police the match. We had no option but to back the Foundation of Hearts"
>
> **Liam Corbett, Hearts fan**

£3 million to rebuild the main stand, which was badly needed. She didn't want to hand the club over to the fans with this weight around our neck of having to rebuild the main stand. We took that to the members. The members voted yes. In the third and fourth year, we gave the club £3 million, then we started paying Ann back.

"We've done that now. We delayed it slightly because of COVID and the relegation we suffered [in 2019-20]. We've ended up raising nearly £13 million, and the messaging has changed now from a five-year plan to a pledge for life."

Earlier this year, with Budge repaid, a majority stake was transferred to the Foundation of Hearts. Fan pledges continue to supply the club with more than £100,000 per month. The model's workability is boosted by the presence of a small group of benefactors, such as Edinburgh-based investor James Anderson, who can make up for any shortfalls that arise.

But Budge has remained in place as chairman, and both FoH and the club have been careful to caution that although Hearts are fan-owned, they are not fan-run.

"Decisions are ultimately made by the manager, Robbie Neilson," explains *Edinburgh News* journalist Barry Anderson. "Sporting director Joe Savage has a major input. Fans are separate from that so it hasn't changed much in that way. At boardroom level, two FoH directors sit on the Hearts board and can then question the manager during meetings, so they can have an input that way."

"You always had a thought in the back of your mind that it will be interesting to see what happens when the ownership transition happens," says Andrew McKinlay, Hearts' chief executive, who was appointed last year, "because over the years FoH and the club have been very clear that fan ownership and fan-run are two different things. The vast majority of fans get that, but you're always going to get some who, now that they own the club through FoH, feel it gives them a greater degree of say or control.

"We've had the two FoH members on the club board for years now. They are an integral part of the board. At least one of them sits on each of the main committees of the board, so they are involved in all the major decisions of the club. Therefore, there's no change from that perspective."

If there is fragility to Hearts' new ownership model, though, it is in the potential for disgruntled fans to make their feelings known by cancelling pledges.

Club saviour... Ann Budge

Back in March, with Hearts in the middle of what would be a run of just two wins from eight Championship games, the Edinburgh side suffered an embarrassing Scottish Cup defeat to Brora Rangers of the Highland League. Some fans protested outside Tynecastle, which was closed to the public due to coronavirus lockdown measures. Others vented their frustration by withdrawing their financial support.

"We lost 400 to 500 members over the period," Halliday says. "However, they're now back and we're breaking all records. We're near to 9,000 members now. We rode the storm. We fronted up. Fans have understood what happened. The club backed the manager and look what happened – we've come back up and we're sitting near the top of the table."

"The first test will come when we go through a sticky patch," McKinlay admits. "Since the changeover of ownership, we've been successful on the park. That makes a huge difference. At some point, we'll have results that the fans are not happy with. We'll see what they're like then.

"We're on a positive momentum at the moment, both on and off the park."

That positivity radiates from the Tynecastle stands. Stake-holding fans might not have a direct say in the day-to-day running of the club, but they feel more deeply connected to Hearts than ever before.

"The Foundation and the club have done a good job of making you feel like it is a big deal," says Hearts fan and FoH member Angela Ballantine. "They've had an open day at Tynecastle. Everybody that pledged has their name in the tunnel, which is quite an emotional thing. They had a special-edition shirt with everybody's name on it. They've done really well with that, to make you realise that you are an integral part of this, no matter how much you've pledged.

"It is good to know now that we are a fan-owned club, that we've achieved it all together."

FoH's stewardship of Hearts gives fans the comfort of knowing they will never again find themselves subject to the whims of a volatile figurehead. Gone are the days of executives threatening to sell the club's home. Gone are the days of suffering at the hands of a businessman growing bored. Gone for good.

"It has been a rollercoaster ride," Halliday says, "but this is now the good part.

"It's us now. It's nobody else."

THE FUTURE OF THE CLASICO

Pedri and Eduardo Camavinga are carving out their careers as future midfield lynchpins for Barcelona and Real Madrid respectively

Words: Nick Bidwell

Born within a few weeks of each other in November 2002, Frenchman Eduardo Camavinga and Spaniard Pedri should be looked at as what that they are: twin sons of different mothers, upmarket contemporaries with a great deal of common ground.

Both are teenage midfielders of the highest possible calibre. Both stand for early-year instant achievement. And both have that rare ability to thrive under pressure, more than happy to be handed huge amounts of responsibility for their respective clubs and national teams.

The impact that the pair have made in such a short space of time has been incredible. For example, Pedri, a native of the Canary Islands, has been a Barcelona player for less than 18 months – joining the *Blaugrana* from second-division outfit Las Palmas in a €5 million switch – and initially was regarded as a strictly long-term project, destined to either be loaned to another La Liga side or to plough a furrow with the Barca reserves.

Then-Barca coach Ronald Koeman, however, had a wholly different plan in mind, immediately inserting him into the first XI and watching him go from strength to strength. A meteoric rise writ large. One moment, he was the young, raw hopeful arriving in the big city; the next, imperiously riding a crest of a wave to stardom.

Even in his wildest dreams, Pedri could not have imagined how swiftly the powers-that-be at Barcelona would fall in love with his vision and snappy creativity. Young players are notoriously prone to ups and downs, to sporadic sequences of doubt and inconsistency – not Pedri. During his rookie season last term, he invariably looked the part, strong enough in mind and body to rack up an impressive 52 appearances for Barca, including 40 as a starter.

Barca's 2-0 Champions League win at Juventus in October 2020 was very much the moment that Pedri embedded himself in the line-up. In just his third senior start for the Catalan giants, Pedri performed with distinction on the left flank, showcasing his touch, control, range of pass, awareness and diligence,

CAMAVINGA
25

as well as linking intelligently with Jordi Alba. "At the age of 17, the Canary Islander went up against the veteran Juve full-back Juan Cuadrado," wrote a reporter from the Barcelona sports daily *Mundo Deportivo*. "Pedri not only stopped the Colombian's attacking forays. He showed a lot of quality and personality when pushing forward dangerously himself."

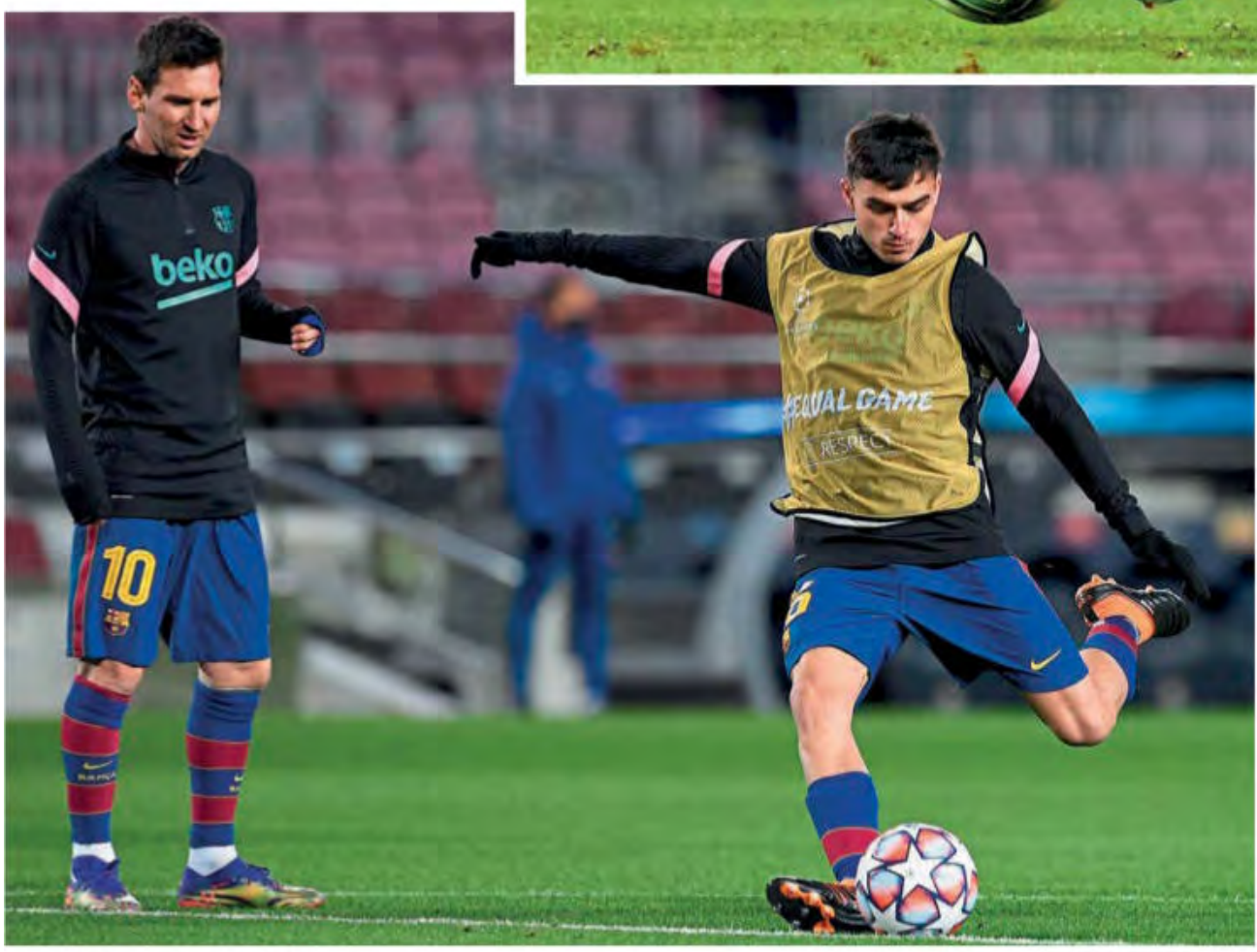
One of the few positive notes in a mediocre season for Barca in 2020-21, Pedri could only be proud of his numerous achievements in that breakthrough campaign: a first senior team trophy (the Copa del Rey, thanks to a 4-0 victory over Athletic Bilbao in the final), opening his goalscoring account in the Champions League (versus Ferencvaros in October 2020, making him one of the competition's youngest scorers), forcing his way into the Spanish Under-21 set-up (his debut coming in September 2020 against Macedonia), earning his first full cap in March 2021 in a World Cup qualifier against Greece, and winning silver with Spain's Olympic team.

He went on to feature in every game for Spain at the Euro 2020 finals too, constantly at the fore as *La Roja* reached the last four. He was deservedly named Young Player of the Tournament and made the Euro 2020 Best XI. Following Spain's penalty shootout loss to Italy in the semi-final, the youngster dissolved into a river of tears. His national team coach Luis Enrique was quick to console him, mentioning him in the same breath as ex-Barca and Spain midfield maestro Andres Iniesta.

"Has anyone noticed what an 18-year-old boy named Pedri has accomplished in the Euros?" asked Luis Enrique. "Not even Andres Iniesta has done it. What Pedri has produced in these championships, I have never seen from anyone in a European Championship, World Cup or Olympics. It's something apart from all logic. I'm delighted that many more are aboard the Pedri bandwagon."

Eduardo Camavinga, who recently moved to Barcelona's arch-rivals Real Madrid from Breton side Rennes in a deal worth some €40m including add-ons, proved an equally fast developer. He was playing for Rennes' reserves as a 15-year-old schoolboy, was barely 16 when he signed his first pro contract in December 2018, and was a first-teamer by the following spring, notably shining in Ligue 1 encounters with Lille and Monaco.

Breakthrough... Pedri at Las Palmas in 2019



Mentor...Lionel Messi was impressed by his young team-mate

Best Young Player... Pedri at Euro 2020

It took him just seven Ligue 1 outings to firmly establish himself as one of the great prospects in the European game. His wonderful display in Rennes' 2-1 upset of Paris Saint-Germain in August 2019 was a breakthrough moment, a game in which his prodigious ability was there for all to see. From first minute to the last, the tender defensive midfielder – aged just 16 years and nine months – was both master and commander, regularly breaking up opposition attacks, spraying the ball around with pin-point accuracy, excellent in his support play and gliding forward into advanced positions. He even found the time to turn provider, clipping a delightful pass into the box which team-mate Romain Del Castillo headed home.

> "Has anyone noticed what an 18-year-old boy named Pedri has accomplished in the Euros? Not even Andres Iniesta has done it"
>
> **Luis Enrique, Spain coach**

Most teenage sensations tend to be attackers, basically wound up and sent forth in wild-card mode. But it requires a special kind of youngster to immediately make an impact in such a key area as midfield, where know-how and authority are so important. Right from the outset, Camavinga was physically and mentally suited to be an engine-room boss.

Shortly after that impactful display against PSG he was named Ligue 1 Player of the Month, and continued to reap the plaudits for the remainder of the 2019-20 season, voted Ligue 1's Revelation of 2019 by *France Football*

magazine. Thanks in large part to his efforts, Rennes qualified for the Champions League via a third-place league finish.

The next objective would be representative honours with France, though first he would have to acquire a Gallic passport. Born in an Angolan refugee camp to Congolese parents, he had lived with his family in the Breton town of Fougeres since the age of two but only became a French citizen in November 2019, turning up for the naturalisation ceremony in Rennes with a snazzy bow tie and mile-wide smile.

After winning his first France Under-21 cap (November 2019 versus Georgia), he received his first call-up to the full squad in August 2020 and made his debut for *Les Bleus* the following month, coming on as a second-half substitute in a 4-2 win over Croatia. At just 17 years, nine months and 29 days, he became the youngest French international in over a century. A month later, in October 2020, he marked his inaugural start for France with a brilliant overhead-kick goal in a 7-1 demolition of Ukraine in Paris.

He would, however, experience something of a sophomore slump last term. For large swathes of the campaign, Camavinga was not nearly as influential for Rennes and it was no real surprise when France boss Didier Deschamps omitted him from his Euro 2020 squad.

Most pundits, though, attributed his dip in form to nothing more than growing pains. As far as top European clubs were concerned, he remained scalding hot property and since joining Madrid on transfer deadline day in August, he has more than lived up to expectations, scoring on his debut at the Bernabeu (in a 5-2 win over Celta Vigo) and providing an assist in the 1-0 Champions League victory over Internazionale.

Pedri – who recently extended his contract with Barca to 2026 and now is the subject of a €1 billion release clause – can testify to the vicissitudes of a football life. In February 2018, aged 15, he travelled with high hopes to the mainland, where he had an unsuccessful trial with the mighty Real Madrid. Three months later, he would join Las Palmas, first impressing in the youth team before forcing his way into the first team in the

Most teenage sensations tend to be attackers...it requires a special kind of youngster to immediately make an impact in such a key area as midfield... right from the outset, Camavinga was physically and mentally suited to be an engine-room boss

Breakthrough...Camavinga in action against Paris Saint-Germain

Youngster...Camavinga celebrates scoring his first goal for France

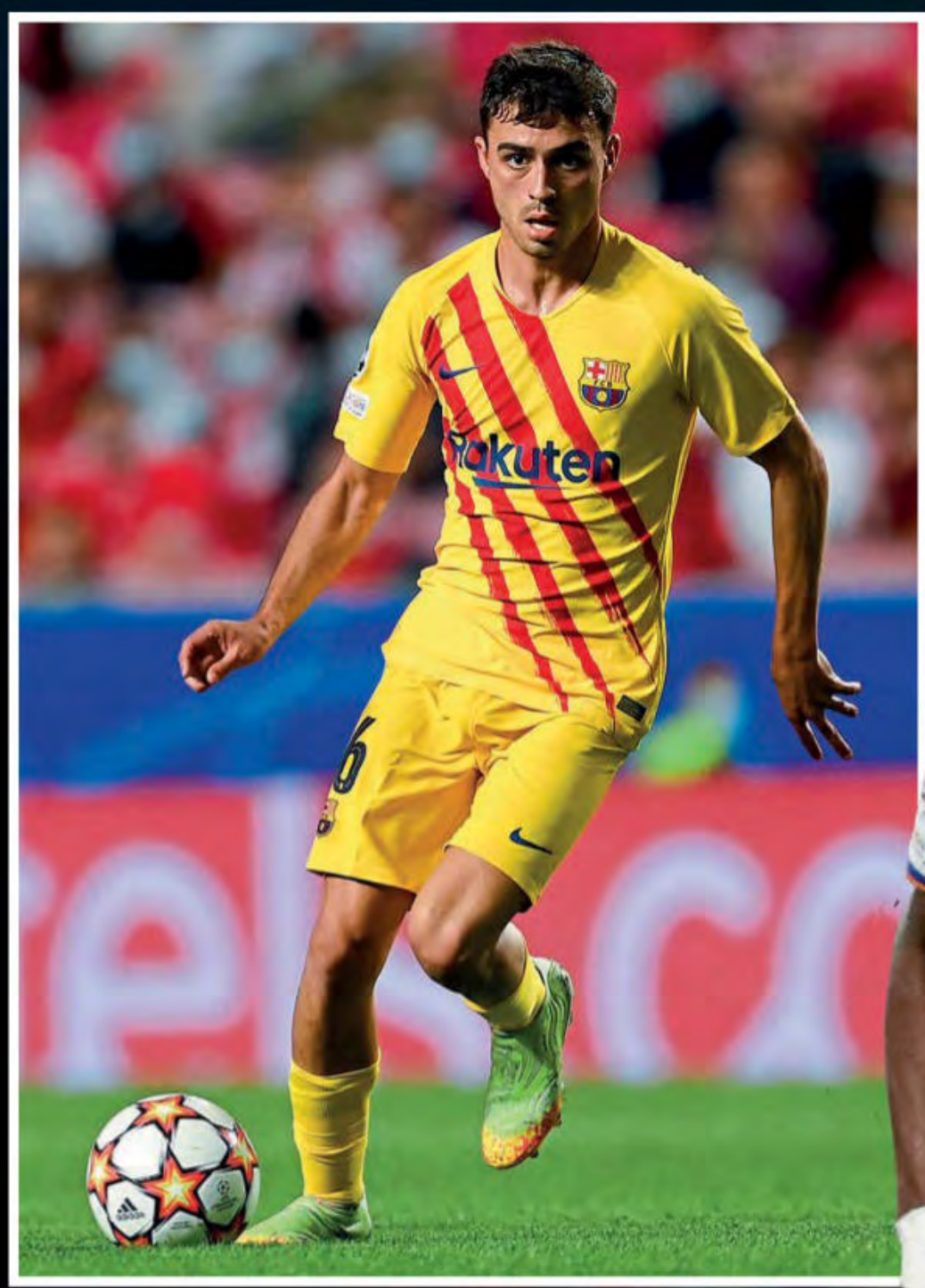
Champions League... Camavinga made his competition debut in 2020-21

2019-20 season. Needless to say, Pedri's subsequent ascent into the stratosphere has left Madrid scouts with serious questions to answer: just how did they let him slip through the net?

According to Manolo Diaz, the former head of the Madrid academy, a snowstorm was essentially to blame, rendering pitches at the training centre unplayable and narrowing Pedri's window of opportunity. "We came to the conclusion that we didn't have enough time to make a decision on whether to take him or not," Diaz told the *SER Catalunya* radio station last year.

Not surprisingly, Pedri had another take on the matter when asked about it in an interview on the *Cadena Ser* airwaves. "I went to Real for a week's trial, but they told me I wasn't up to it. Thank goodness, they told me I wasn't good enough. If not, I wouldn't be today at the club I've always loved."

Nor was Pedri universally acclaimed as the irreplaceable boy wonder at Las Palmas. A few days into 2019-20 pre-season training, the Canarian club's head coach Pepe Mel was at pains to stress to reporters that he had no plans to deploy the youngster in his side. "Like I said, whether it's a few games or



Looking ahead... Pedri is already a mainstay for Barca

Prospect...Camavinga will soon take over in Madrid's midfield

none at all, he is going to play for the reserves." This apparently definitive verdict would not age well. By the start of the new season, the 16-year-old Pedri was indeed a first-teamer, scoring goals, creating them and generally playing the role of prodigy to perfection. Cue Pepe Mel's change of tune: "Pedri will mark an era in Spanish football."

By way of contrast, Camavinga's formative years at Rennes were a much steadier, linear affair. Grandees at the Breton club knew full well they had a jewel in their midst and that it would just be a matter of time before the kid – whom they first brought to their academy as an 11-year-old – would crash through the big-time gates. The late Didier Le Bras, one of his first coaches at Rennes, certainly thought so and in a book he wrote some years later, reproduced his report card on the adolescent Camavinga. "A superb No.10 blessed with a terrific left foot. It was a real pleasure to work with him. He has everything required to succeed."

To their credit, Rennes handled him with great care, particularly astute in encouraging him to play several different positions during his apprenticeship. Indeed, Eduardo remembers occupying the left-back berth in his first training session with the professionals. Contrary to urban myth, the Breton club did not throw him in at the deep end on a whim. Sensibly, they had him training with the first team for a good six months prior to handing him his senior start against Monaco in May 2019.

Sooner rather than later, Camavinga will take over from one of Madrid's ageing midfield trio, while Pedri is clearly made of the Barca DNA

"We didn't push him to overdo it," declared Mathieu Le Scornet, the Rennes youth-team coach who discovered him during an eight-a-side. "We prepared him and there was a real process to lay the foundations for him to be totally ready for the moment when he stepped onto a professional field of play."

Real Madrid and Barcelona rightly have identified Camavinga and Pedri as key building blocks in their respective rebuilds. Circumstances meant that neither player was on the pitch in October's *Clasico*, with Pedri ruled out by injury and Camavinga on the bench.

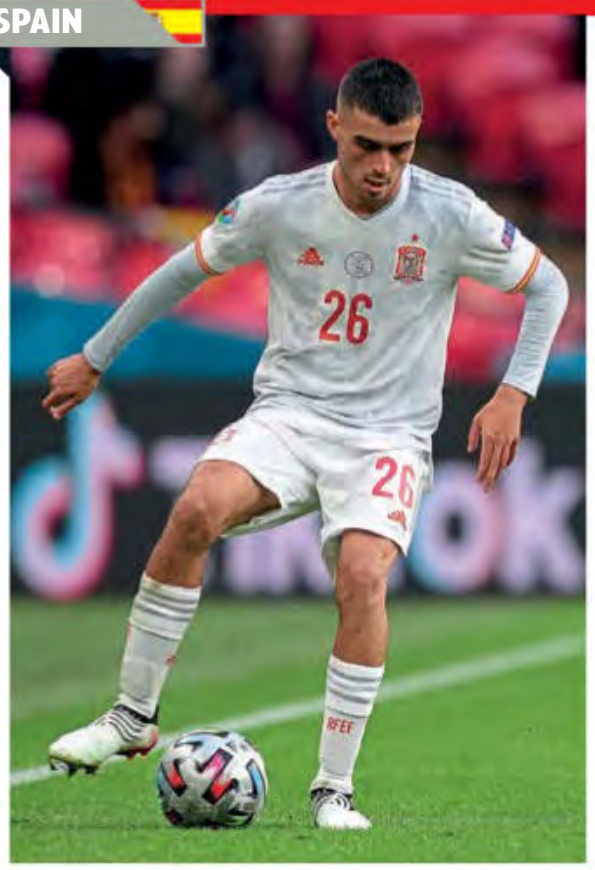
When they do finally meet however – possibly in January's Spanish Super Cup semi-final – it will undoubtedly be the first of many. Sooner rather than later, Camavinga will take over from one of Madrid's ageing midfield trio (Casemiro, Toni Kroos and Luka Modric), while Pedri is clearly made of the Barca DNA, the cerebral and technical characteristics which made Xavi and Iniesta such *Blaugrana* heroes.

The boy from the refugee camp and the little Canarian have already covered an inordinate amount of distance in their short careers. Now for the next and potentially most difficult phase – confirming that immense promise.

the numbers game

Pedri

SPAIN



2020-21 STATS

La Liga

Games	37
Goals	3
Assists	3

Champions League

Games	7
Goals	1
Assists	1

49

Before the start of this season, Pedri played 49 official senior club games in 2021 – more than any other teenager in the world

Camavinga

FRANCE

2020-21 STATS

Ligue 1

Games	35
Goals	1
Assists	2

Champions League

Games	4
Goals	0
Assists	0

6

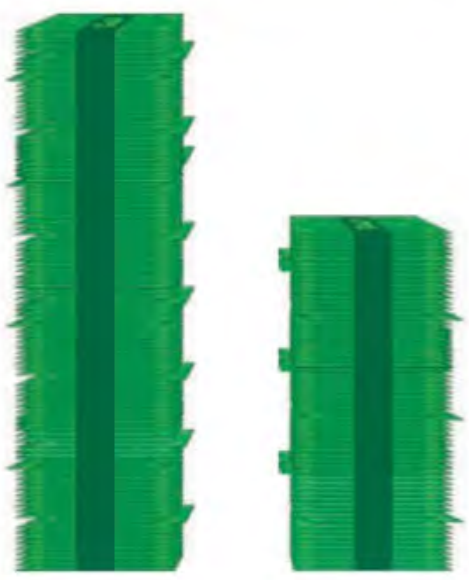
Camavinga scored his first Real Madrid goal within six minutes of coming off the substitutes' bench

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE WONDERKIDS

Youngest players in last season's competition

	Player	Age
1	**Youssoufa Moukoko** *(Borussia Dortmund & Germany)*	16 years, 18 days
2	**Jude Bellingham** *(Borussia Dortmund & England)*	17 years, 3 months, 21 days
3	**Bright Arrey-Mbi** *(Bayern Munich & Germany)*	17 years, 8 months, 5 days
4	**Jamal Musiala** *(Bayern Munich & Germany)*	17 years, 8 months, 8 days
5	**Pedri** *(Barcelona & Spain)*	17 years, 10 months, 25 days
6	**Giovanni Reyna** *(Borussia Dortmund & United States)*	17 years, 11 months, 7 days
7	**Eduardo Camavinga** *(Rennes & France)*	17 years, 11 months, 10 days
8	**Ansu Fati** *(Barcelona & Spain)*	17 years, 11 months, 19 days
9	**Billy Koumetio** *(Liverpool & France)*	18 years, 25 days
10	**Ilya Zabarnyi** *(Dynamo Kiev & Ukraine)*	18 years, 1 month, 18 days

ESTIMATED TRANSFER VALUE*



£72m Pedri

£49.5m Camavinga

*According to estimates from transfermarkt.co.uk

A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

After a turbulent couple of years across European football, talks of a merger between the Belgian and Dutch top flights have increased. **Samindra Kunti** and **Klaas-Jan Droppert** report from the two countries to assess the likelihood of a new league being formed…

If there was a single phrase that dominated football in 2021 it would probably be "Super League". The announcement, in April, of 12 clubs' intention to join forces and form a new league was widely criticised by fans and media as a cynical cash grab from the already-established elite, and the latest step in trying to preserve their own dominance.

While the talks have been shelved for now, the plotting, scheming and conniving will not stop anytime soon, with reforms to the international match calendar to be introduced from 2024 onwards.

For others though, forming a new league may offer a chance to bridge the gap to the top. Faced with the increasing inequality, smaller countries and leagues are pondering their own futures. In Belgium and the Netherlands, there have been whispers of the Jupiler Pro League and Eredivisie combining to form a new league: the BeNeLiga.

First mooted in the mid-1990s, the proposal was based on the cultural and economic ties between both countries, offering the chance to scale and level up. Harry van Raaij, the late PSV chairman, was one of the trailblazers of a combined Dutch-Belgian league.

The idea fleetingly went in and out of the conversation, but mostly lay dormant. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and 2024 deadline have reignited the BeNeLiga debate.

The idea is for ten clubs from the Netherlands and eight from Belgium to compete against each other. The lowest-ranked clubs of each country would then be relegated to the domestic league, while the champions of those leagues would earn promotion.

Essentially, the thinking is that Ajax v Anderlecht, Feyenoord v Standard Liege or PSV v Club Brugge would be far more attractive than, with all due respect, Ajax v RKC Waalwijk or Club Brugge v Sint-Truiden – both for the clubs as much as for the fans in the stadiums and at home.

For some it is seen as the last chance to keep up with the European giants before all is lost, for others it shows as much disregard for the smaller clubs as proposals for the European Super League showed to the rest of Europe.

18+

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AVAXHOME-

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The view from BELGIUM

Among the major advocates in Belgium are current champions Club Brugge and their chairman Bart Verhaeghe.

The club's recent domestic track record is more or less a victory parade. In fact, on the back of two league crowns and financial stability, the club's hierarchy likes to think it has outgrown Belgium. Plans for a new 40,000-seater stadium on the site of the current Jan Breydelstadion are advancing, and a cross-border league would be central to driving revenue and growth, tapping into a market of 28 million people and exploiting broadcast rights outside home territory. Verhaeghe calls it "entering modernity".

Genk chairman Peter Croonen is another BeNeLiga zealot; he believes that both the Belgian and Dutch leagues are flatlining. In the top five European leagues average revenue hit €160 million; in the smaller leagues only €31m. Croonen, Verhaeghe and Belgium's other big clubs dream of Super Sundays with Club Brugge v Feyenoord and Ajax v Anderlecht, attractive fixtures to replace the provincial rivalries. They don't want to be left behind in a world of super clubs and closed competitions.

In March, BeNeLiga backers scored a victory when the general assembly of the Belgian Pro League unanimously voted in favour of an "agreement in principle" – in other words, that they would keep exploring the idea. "This ambition is based both on the respect of the big clubs' sporting ambitions and on the need for economic stability for the other professional clubs," wrote the Pro League in a statement. "The 25 clubs are unanimous in their desire to give the BeNeLiga a fair chance."

> "The 25 clubs are unanimous in their desire to give the BeNeLiga a fair chance"
>
> **Pro League statement**

For the first time, the idea appealed to the smaller clubs. A Deloitte study proposed a BeNeLiga with eight Belgian clubs and ten Dutch clubs, relegation and promotion, and €400m per season in marketing and television rights revenues – the ultimate sales point. The current TV contract for the Belgian top flight is worth €103m per season. The regional league could hence become Europe's sixth-biggest league behind the big five and, perhaps, make Dutch and Belgian clubs competitive again in Europe. For now, they can only dream of achieving the European success of the 1970s and '80s. No club outside the big five has won the Champions League since Jose Mourinho's Porto in 2004, and Ajax were the last Dutch outfit to reach the final of the Europa League in 2017.

Advocate...Club Brugge chairman Bart Verhaeghe

On paper, a BeNeLiga has potential merits but, in reality, a merger will need time to come to fruition. The obstacles are numerous: will broadcasters be prepared to spend big? Will the Belgian ecosystem survive without the big clubs on which smaller counterparts rely for the big match-day income and broadcast payments? How many European tickets would be allocated to the BeNeLiga? At present, the Belgian and Dutch leagues send their five best teams to European club competitions but, in the cross-border format, ten tickets seems very generous.

These are but some of the commercial and regulatory issues that would need addressing. Above all, Belgium's biggest clubs are the driving force behind the BeNeLiga, so will the Netherlands play ball? The success of Belgium's national team in the past decade cannot conceal the unsavoury reputation of the domestic top flight, where a dysfunctional league format, low minimum wages for players, disreputable agents, foreign owners and debt-ridden clubs cast a deep and dark shadow over the game.

The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated the industry's fragilities with its perennial, larger-than-life spend thrust, and compelled clubs to prioritise more pressing matters than a cross-border league that never seems to get beyond an embryonic, brainstorming stage.

Samindra Kunti

The view from the NETHERLANDS

The idea behind a combined Dutch and Belgian league has always been to create competition in order to keep up with the European giants of England, Germany, Spain, France and Italy. Becoming the continent's sixth-strongest league was the aim.

However, in the Netherlands the idea has always been rejected from the start. Organisational problems, like the exact distribution of the money, meant that the plan ended in the trash bin almost the moment it was launched.

Nevertheless, over the years there have been advocates of the plan, such as Marco van Basten. "The big leagues are robbing our players," said the then-national team coach back in 2006. "During my playing days there were maybe five players abroad. Now there are 50. That isn't good for the league."

Despite the plea of such a Dutch legend, the BeNeLiga has never been embraced by the clubs; especially those who would be left behind. They fear that only the top teams will benefit from it, while they are stuck in a stripped-down league, where it would be hard to survive without the annual visits of Ajax, Feyenoord or PSV. Unlike in other leagues, the Dutch clubs' budgets are substantially based on season-ticket holders.

It looked like an idea that could be filed under: "Thank you for coming; don't call us, we'll call you". However, since 2019 there has been a new lobby. Ten Dutch clubs have been negotiating the plan of a BeNeLiga, while the Dutch and Belgian FAs were also involved. A date has even been set: 2025. That is when the current television deal with ESPN will be terminated.

In 2017 the boards of Anderlecht, PSV and Ajax visited UEFA to talk about a joint league. At first they were greeted with enthusiasm, but the idea hasn't exactly been a top priority at the headquarters in Nyon.

There has been more disappointment since. Both FAs had hoped that the new league would retain ten tickets (five per country) for the three major European competitions, but UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin has already stated this will not happen. As it stands, there would be a maximum of seven tickets.

This came as a big blow for BeNeLiga advocates, as they had hoped to make this one of the new league's selling points. The chances of clubs like FC Utrecht or Vitesse clinching a spot in Europe would therefore be reduced. In fact, by staying in the current domestic league, their chances are much higher. And who knows what UEFA will promise the giant clubs in order to prevent them from a breakaway. More entrants from their league? That will almost certainly go at the expense of the smaller league participants.

Unlike in Belgium, who voted unanimously in favour, Dutch clubs remain reluctant to commit to any notion of a BeNeLiga. First, there has to be clarity about several aspects; they will only vote when a full proposal is on the table. From their point of view, the possible scenarios should be further investigated. The main question is: how will the clubs who stay in the Dutch league be compensated? Only when all clubs benefit might there be support. However, so far a broadcasting company hasn't been found, so the profits remain unclear.

To get the green light, 15 out of the 18 Eredivisie clubs must vote in favour. Otherwise, as far as the Dutch clubs are concerned, this league will end up exactly where it did 30 years ago: in the trash bin.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

> "The big leagues are robbing our players…that isn't good for the league"
>
> **Marco van Basten**

In favour…former Netherlands coach Marco van Basten

MEKE MWASE

"We are not going to the finals just to participate"

Ahead of Malawi's first AFCON since 2010, and only the third in their history, manager Meke Mwase sits down with *World Soccer* to discuss his team's preparations

Malawi have qualified for only their third-ever Africa Cup of Nations finals, and for the first time since 2010. Is there a fever building up in the country?
Everyone is so excited. It's taken a bit of time since 2010 for Malawi to qualify for the finals, so everybody's happy. We've just had the trophy tour and you got a real sense of how much everyone is looking forward to the tournament and how much the public wants us to do well. It is really building up and by the time the tournament starts the whole country is going to be watching and behind us.

You exceeded expectations by edging out Uganda in a tough qualifying group to finish second. How did that happen?
There wasn't really any secret to it all, we just did what we needed to. It was about making sure the boys had confidence and that we approached each game with a real hardworking spirit. We tried to win every game, even if we were playing away. We lost in Burkina Faso and Uganda, but got vital points away in South Sudan.

How confident are you about the strength and depth of your squad?
We still have a very young team, one that has been learning its way. But we are very confident that we will be able to set down a few markers in Cameroon. We are not going to the finals just to participate, the idea is to leave an impression there and to make some waves. The fact that 16 of the 24 teams advance after the first round gives us every chance of getting to the knockout stage, and that is our goal. But then, as we've seen with many of these tournaments, it becomes a lottery and you have as good a chance as any team to keep progressing.

Look, we are not talking about going all the way to the semi-final or final but in knockout competition everything is possible. We are really hoping that the boys will give it their all, because it is such a good stage to show what they are capable of, but also for Malawi because it can be a real boost for the country.

So what is your minimum target at the tournament in January?
Malawi have been there twice before [in 1984 and 2010] but we haven't qualified out of the group phase yet. This is what we will be primarily fighting for. But, once we are in the knockout stages as I've already mentioned, we believe that we could go much further. In football, anything is possible.

Most of the top African sides have an extensive roster of players based in Europe, but you only have a handful of professional players based outside of Malawi. Is that cause for concern?
We have quite a lot of players at clubs in South Africa and that actually helped a lot during the pandemic in that we were able to get the squad together easier than if we had many based in Europe and would have had to battle with travel restrictions and quarantine rules. So maybe it worked a bit in our favour.

But now I'm worried because most of my overseas-based players are not getting enough game time. I fear we might be short on match fitness in January. We need the input of our foreign-based players because they are big contributors to our success, and what they bring back to the squad rubs off on the younger, home-based boys. I'm monitoring them all the time and I must admit I'm a little concerned.

And what did you think of the draw? Senegal and Guinea are tough propositions, so could the match against Zimbabwe be the key game in Group B?
Yes, although I would suggest that there is not much to choose between any of the teams in our group – they are all very strong. But I don't think it would really matter who we got because we were always going to be up against the best teams on the continent in this tournament. We are going to fight to give ourselves the best possible chance.

Do you feel happy with your preparation plans, in terms of friendlies and training camps to be ready for the tournament?
That is another concern that I have been grappling with. I'm worried right now because I've been having talks with management about just what sort of preparations we are going to have. I want them to allow us to go away for a decent amount of time to train and acclimatise. Ideally, I'd like to go to one of the countries

Photo credit: Alamy

bordering on Cameroon, so we can have the same conditions we are going to encounter when we get there. I'm talking to our FA about allowing us to have an extensive and proper preparation for the finals but we're still waiting for the answers. So we haven't finalised anything just yet with less than two months to go.

You are a young and inexperienced coach, so how exciting is it to be pitting your wits up against the top coaches on the continent?
It is going to be very exciting. I was the acting coach from April 2019 and then handed the job permanently in mid-year, so it's only two years that I have had this job – and coaching at this level is incredibly tough. I don't have much experience when compared with the guys that I'm going to be up against. I was a little in awe when I met some of them at the draw earlier in the year and we toured the facilities together. I got a chance to talk to some of them, especially the Nigeria coach Gernot Rohr, who was very kind and spent some time with me. For a young coach like myself it's a thrilling prospect.

Not too daunting?
It's football; we want to take them on.

Since AFCON qualification, you've been competing in the World Cup qualifiers with Cameroon and the Ivory Coast, but with limited success. Has that dented your confidence?
It's been something of a milestone for us to get into the group stage of the African World Cup qualifiers, because for the last World Cup in Russia we were out after just two knockout matches. Playing teams like Ivory Coast and Cameroon has given us another edge. Although we've lost to them and we're out of the World Cup race, I feel there has been a lot of improvement in our own game. We've tried to use the World Cup qualifiers to keep a consistent team selection and just to increase the exposure for our players to what it's going to be like to take on some of the top teams in Africa. We've treated it like it's our preparation for the Cup of Nations finals.

What would you say is the biggest strength of the Malawi side?
The fact that other countries won't know much about us could work in our favour, but our strength is the hardworking spirit in our boys that I feel is going to make a difference.

Interview by Mark Gleeson

RYAN GAULD

"Maybe I'm not cut out to be in the UK"

Few British players have had a career quite like Ryan Gauld's. **Sean Cole** sits down with the man once labelled the "Scottish Messi" to reflect on the journey so far…

How would you describe yourself as a footballer?
I'm hardworking and I like to be creative. I put the team ahead of myself. I'm not a selfish player. I'd much rather the team does well than me individually, but if that means I can chip in with a few goals and assists then even better.

You were compared to Lionel Messi when you first burst onto the scene. How did that feel?
In the beginning, it was okay. It was quite laughable. It's something you take as a positive when you're 16, 17 years old. I was living with a few of my pals at the time, at Dundee United, so we had a good enough joke about it. But as it's followed me through my career, it's become less amusing.

You were part of a really promising group of young players at Dundee United. What was that like?
It was brilliant. When you look back on the squad now, it's crazy to see what some of the boys have gone on to achieve. The obvious one is Andy Robertson at Liverpool, but you've also got the likes of Stuart Armstrong, Gary Mackay-Steven and Nadir Ciftci, who all ended up going to Celtic. John Souttar's been unfortunate with injuries, but he's proved how good a player he is when he's been picked for Scotland. It wasn't just a brilliant team, but a great changing-room to be in. There were a lot of young boys and we all got on really well together.

Has Andy Robertson's success with Liverpool surprised you at all?
I wasn't too aware of him when he first came to United. When you're taking a young left-back from Queen's Park, you think that he's going to be the second choice, but he had a great start with us. He just never looked back. Every game, he kept getting better and better. It's not a surprise what he's gone on to achieve. He took a good step when he went to Hull City and proved that he was more than capable of playing in the Premier League. He definitely deserves everything he's getting.

How did your move to Sporting come about? What appealed to you about it?
It happened a couple of days before pre-season was starting in Scotland. I was just told that a top European club was interested and I could go and speak to them, but I wasn't told who it was until I was about to fly out there. I've always wanted to play in Europe, so when the opportunity arose, I didn't think twice about it. I thought it was going to be a good place to grow as a footballer. I also felt that I was ready for the next step after two seasons in United's first team.

How do you reflect on the five years you spent in Lisbon?
I've got mixed emotions. I've got really good memories of playing with great players and being coached by really good managers, but obviously I didn't get the game time that I wanted, and thought I could achieve, when I first went over. But I wouldn't change it for anything because I never knew if that opportunity to play abroad would come again, so I jumped at the chance. There were highs and lows, but I'm definitely glad that I gave it a shot.

You only made five appearances for the first team. Why was that?
I knew that it was going to take time to learn the language and learn the way they play in Portugal. I was only 18. I knew it was going to be tough. I was told that I'd just make a couple of appearances from the bench, and play in the League Cup, but I'd play a lot of games for the B team to help me adjust. That first year went to plan but then they changed managers. I went and played a full season in the B team, and trained now and again with the first team, but it was just loan moves after that. Every manager's got their own opinion. They like some players, and they don't like others. I wasn't part of his plans, so I just had to deal with it.

Did you ever wonder if you'd made the right decision by moving abroad?
I did question it. There were a couple of opportunities to go back to Scotland, but I didn't want to give up at the first sign of ➤

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it being hard. I feel like that would have been the easy way out. I was happy to try to kick-start my career in Europe with the loan moves. The first couple weren't great due to injury and not getting much game time, but I was glad that I stuck it out. I wanted to give it a really good shot and coming back after a year or 18 months wouldn't have been the right way to do it.

Joining Farense permanently in 2019 really seemed to reignite your career. Why do you think that was?
A big part of it was the manager [Sergio Vieira]. He called me a few times. He was really keen to take me, and it was the first time that I'd felt really wanted in a few years. He was clearly building a team that was going to be fighting for promotion and he wanted me to be a big part of that. I knew that, if I got my head down and worked hard, I was going to be one of the main pieces to help get the club back up.

How did it feel to win promotion and finally make your mark in Portugal?
It was brilliant. It was just unfortunate that COVID hit and we couldn't celebrate it the right way, with the fans. I think it was clear that we were, if not the best team, definitely in the top two in the league. If the season would have carried on, I believe we would have gone up anyway.

Although Farense were relegated last season, what did it mean to play consistently in the Primeira Liga?
That was what I'd been aiming for, ever since I first went to Portugal. It took me a lot longer than I expected, but it made the few years before that worth it. I'd stuck it out and managed to get into the first division in a team where I felt completely at home, and I really enjoyed working with the manager. Just to get the opportunity to show that I was ready was a great feeling. It was a rough season for the team, but for me personally, it was everything I'd been hoping for.

What interest did you have when your contract expired in the summer? Why did you decide to join Vancouver Whitecaps?
MLS was always a league I was quite interested in, and I was intrigued to live over here. There was a fair bit of interest and quite a few things to go through with my agents, my girlfriend and my family. When we pieced everything together, Vancouver was the best place to be. It was the right club and the right city. It was definitely the club that made me feel the most wanted and as though I could help them. It felt like the right place to take the next step in my career.

How does MLS compare to your experiences of football in Europe?
The intensity's probably higher here. When you play against the bigger teams in Portugal – Sporting, Porto, Benfica – they're tough

"Scottish Messi"...Gauld drew huge praise after bursting onto the scene with Dundee United back in 2012

games against really good players, but when you look lower down the league there's a big difference in quality. I think, in MLS, it's a lot more balanced. When teams at the top play teams at the bottom, they can be close games. Every team's got a lot of ability. I think it's a more intense and competitive league.

You played a lot of games for Scotland at youth level. Are you disappointed not to have won your first senior cap?
That's obviously been an objective of mine for a long time, but the manager has his reasons and I've not been included as yet. All I can do is keep my head down and work hard. If the day comes, it comes. If it doesn't, that'll just be unfortunate. I'm not sure if anyone's watching, or what the management think of the league, but they've got all the software necessary to watch any clips or matches if they want to.

> "[Playing for Scotland has] obviously been an objective of mine for a long time…but I'm not sure if anyone's watching"

There was a clamour for you to be included in Scotland's squad for the Euros. Did you think you were in with a chance?
Yeah, I thought I could be in with a shout. Not initially, to be honest, when it was a 23-man squad, but then they added the extra three and I thought I could have a chance. But he ended up going with the younger boys who might play a bigger part in the future, so I just had to accept that. There was nothing else I could do about it really.

If selected, what do you think you could add to the Scotland team?
They've got an abundance of good attacking midfielders already, but you always like to think that you could add something different. If I got in, maybe I could add that final pass, but the manager obviously thinks they've already got that. We'll just see what his decisions are in the future. All I can do is keep working hard and put Vancouver first because they're the ones who have shown the most faith in me.

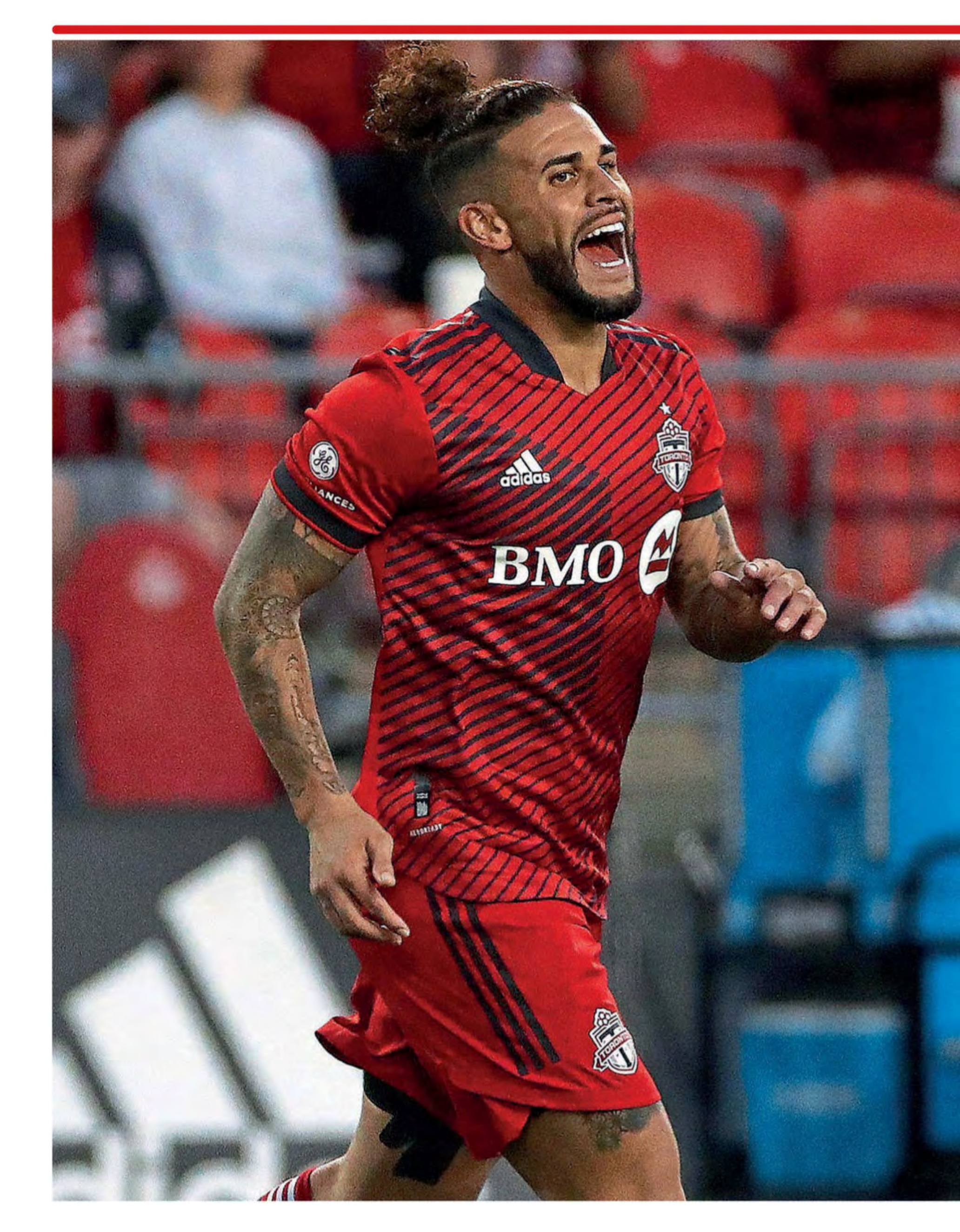
Do you plan on returning to Scotland, or Europe in general, at some point in the future?
I've not given too much thought to it. I've just got here so all my focus has been on the team. I think the few months that I had at Hibernian a couple of years ago reinforced the idea that maybe I'm not cut out to be in the UK. But Europe, who knows? That could always be a possibility, but, after this season, I've got another three years with the club and there's a lot we can achieve in that time. That's what I'm looking forward to.

What do you mean by not being cut out to be in the UK?
When I went back there, I didn't really feel comfortable. I wasn't happy, for whatever reason. I didn't feel like I could really make my mark in the UK. Because it was only a loan move, just six weeks in I was thinking that my next step was going to have to be back in Europe. It was just where I was better suited to, football-wise and in terms of living too.

What are you most proud of achieving in your career so far?
Sticking it out in Portugal for seven years. Looking back, I'm really glad that I did that. Also, the risks I've taken, moving to different clubs and trying new things. Now, moving halfway across the world is another risk and another experience. I've built up experience of what I want from football and what I want from life.

Interview by Sean Cole

Young prodigy... starring for Scotland Under-19s in 2014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FROM NORWICH TO TORONTO

Dom Dwyer discusses his career, from being released by Norwich City to one of the most prominent strikers in MLS…

Words: Sean Cole

Dom Dwyer never could have envisaged where an American college scholarship would lead him, and how profoundly it would change his fortunes. As a teenager, playing non-League football in his native England, the prospect of a professional career was fading from view.

Now, 12 years on, Dwyer has more than 100 competitive goals to his name, including two for his adopted homeland, having taken US citizenship in 2017. He's become one of the most clinical strikers in Major League Soccer and built a new life for himself across the Atlantic. Previously married to World Cup winner Sydney Leroux, they have two children together.

"It's incredible," says Dwyer, reflecting on the transformation he's undergone. "I came over here with a pair of football boots and now I've got all these things. I've got these little lives I'm responsible for. I have a great family and support system around me. I'm in a really good position to succeed. I'm just grateful."

After being released by Norwich City aged 15, Dwyer played for Staines Town and King's Lynn. The idea of making a living from football was a distant dream. "It was a very humbling experience. You see if you really want it. You see the hard work and the grit. It's not all glitz and glamour."

A broken metatarsal gave him pause for thought. Realising how fragile his ambitions were, Dwyer started exploring other options. He needed a back-up plan. After impressing in a trial game at Queens Park Rangers' training ground, he accepted the offer of a scholarship at Tyler Junior College in Texas.

Two national championships ensued for the fiercely competitive Dwyer, who was soon regarded as one of the most exciting young talents outside of MLS. During his first year at the University of South Florida, he was drafted by Sporting Kansas City.

"I really grew up there. My intention when I finished college was to get my degree and go back to England and play. I ended up staying out here and having an amazing time in MLS," he says. "I think I underestimated the level. As soon as I started playing, I realised how physical it was and how difficult it was. How much there was to learn."

Dwyer's first season at Kansas required patience. Gradually adapting to the demands of a new environment, new team-mates and a much higher standard of football meant that minutes on the pitch were few and far between. But he kept believing.

A loan move to Orlando City, who were then in the third-tier USL Pro Championship, made all the difference. Dwyer dominated the scoring charts

with 22 goals in 17 games. Full of confidence, he was recalled by his parent club in June 2013 and seized his opportunity. He started in the final of the MLS Cup as Sporting beat Real Salt Lake on penalties.

"That year I won two championships, which was pretty special. Nothing feels the same as that MLS Cup. I want to get that one back. The MLS Cup and the Supporters' Shield are two targets that I have in my sights," says Dwyer, who joined Toronto FC in May. "I've got a three-year plan in my head and I'm working towards that. I'm looking forward to a few trophies here."

Buoyed by that success, and a great supply line, the next season was his most prolific so far. Dwyer scored 22 league goals, more than anyone else except for fellow Englishman Bradley Wright-Phillips, whose brace for New York Red Bulls knocked Sporting out of the play-offs. Robbie Keane, Clint Dempsey and Thierry Henry trailed in his wake.

"I was on a great team. I had a great No.10 – Benny Feilhaber – who was feeding me passes. You get hungry for chances. You've got to keep your movement sharp, but you require service. I got a lot of service, and I was able to put those chances away," says the striker.

MLS Cup...Sporting Kansas City won the MLS Cup in Dwyer's first season

"I wrapped up a great statistical season, but I was devastated with it because I felt like we had the team that was supposed to win that year. That was a tough one. I could see it being a perfect trajectory, but we fell short."

While collective success eluded Sporting, Dwyer continued to thrive. Across the 2015 and 2016 seasons, he registered another 33 goals in all competitions. His bustling, purposeful performances were impossible to ignore. After eight years in the USA, he became an American citizen and was called up to Bruce Arena's squad for the CONCACAF Gold Cup.

"I was very lucky. I'd had my green card for long enough and I was eligible. I was performing well in the league. There was no American striker who was scoring as many goals as me. I always dreamt of playing for England, but at 26 I probably wasn't going to get in the squad unless I did a Jamie Vardy," explains Dwyer.

"I just saw an opportunity. I'm very grateful for the time I've had in this country, and I thought I could repay that by performing at the level I know I can. I've seen the league grow in the last ten years and I see its potential."

Dwyer's call-up raised complex questions of identity and allegiance. A proud Englishman, with no previous connection to the USA, he had thrived in the self-styled land of opportunity and was eager to represent them on the international stage.

He did so impressively, making his debut in a friendly against Ghana a week before the tournament started. After 19

First pick...Dwyer was Sporting's first-round draft pick in 2012

minutes, Dwyer opened his account. The ball sat up nicely and he slammed it into the back of the net, before embarking on an acrobatic celebration.

"It was amazing. I was very focused. I was transitioning through a trade from Kansas to Orlando, so it was a turbulent time in my career off the field. But on it, I was getting so many opportunities and scoring goals. I just enjoyed getting to know the group and feeling like I belonged at that level."

In the USA's Gold Cup opener, he swivelled to convert a low cross, giving his side the lead early in the second half. Although Panama hit back to earn a draw, Dwyer had made a dream start. Dropped to the bench against Martinique, he started the last group game – a 3-0 win over Nicaragua – but was then cut from the squad as Arena made six changes ahead of the knockout phase.

The USA went on to win the tournament, but Dwyer picked up just one more cap later that year. Competition for places increased, and he was unable to hit the same heights as consistently at Orlando City. Despite recent injury problems contributing to a slow start at Toronto, he still hopes to play for the national team again.

"I'd like to get back involved. It's been a few years since I've been to a camp. I need to get myself healthy and stay on the field," says Dwyer. "I always challenge myself. I want to play at the highest level. I want more than four caps. I definitely want to play, and that group is very young, talented and exciting. If I was ever called upon, of course I'd jump at the opportunity."

In July 2017, Dwyer moved to Orlando. It was the most expensive transfer between two MLS sides in the league's history and saw him return to the club that had kick-started his American adventure during that productive loan spell four years earlier. In doing so, he briefly linked up with Brazilian international and former Ballon d'Or winner Kaka.

"It was like FIFA. It wasn't real. You watch these players on TV when you're a little boy dreaming about playing in the World Cup. Then you're sitting next to them in the locker room and playing with them," recalls Dwyer.

"I already know how this guy plays. I've watched him for years. I already know what moves to make. It's a striker's dream. It's just an amazing experience to be able to share the field with those kinds of players. That's what you work hard for, to realise that you can reach that level."

Since David Beckham first paved the way with LA Galaxy, many of England's biggest stars have played in MLS over the last decade, including Steven Gerrard, Frank Lampard and Ashley Cole. But for Dwyer, none of them compare to the bullishly brilliant Wayne Rooney, who shone at D.C. United.

"He was great with me. I met him at the media tour and we had some good chats. He gave me some good advice as well. He's the greatest goalscorer for England. I love his mindset. He has a different style of play to me – with his range of passing – but that power and tenacity is what made him stand out," says Dwyer.

Even as Nani arrived to bolster their attacking threat, Orlando struggled, missing out on the play-offs in 2018 and 2019. Dwyer enjoyed playing with the Portuguese winger when he got the chance, but his last year in Florida was badly disrupted. In August, he underwent knee surgery and didn't get to play for the club again.

"It was difficult. I was coming towards the end of my contract, and I had an injury. It was a patella tendon tear, so I had to wait a little bit longer. The play-offs were in November. I was ready, but they didn't want to throw me in at that point. I wasn't fully fit, and the team were performing well. It just wasn't meant to be."

Without an offer to extend his stay, Dwyer elected to become a free agent. He worked hard on his rehabilitation and recovery. It was difficult to stay motivated when progress was slow and the future seemed uncertain, but his persistence paid off as he signed an 18-month deal with Toronto.

"This opportunity came up and it seemed to make sense for everyone," says the 31-year-old. "I'm very excited. I get to perform with some quality players at a big club. They showed interest in me and I think I have a long-term future in Toronto."

After a testing spell away from football, Dwyer is keen to reassert himself. He wants to prove that he's still one of the best strikers in MLS and fire a talented yet under-performing Toronto to some more silverware. Playing alongside Michael Bradley, Jozy Altidore and others can only help his cause.

"It's a very high level. I went from no club wanting me and not knowing where I was going to play, to playing with the MLS MVP in Alejandro Pozuelo. I've seen him in training and he's frightening. This guy's magical to watch. I'm just building chemistry with these players. I want to get back on the field and get scoring goals."

Football is a ruthless business, where you're only ever as good as your last game. There haven't been enough for Dwyer recently and he's desperate for that to change. Having gone from non-League anonymity to MLS stardom in the space of four years, he knows how quickly the landscape can shift and he's keen to write the next chapter in a remarkable career.

"I just want to work hard, perform well and make my family proud of me. I want to play at a high level. I still have a lot to give to the game. My goal is to play until I'm 36. I've got five more years of pushing myself and we'll see what's next."

> "It was like FIFA. It wasn't real. You watch these players on TV when you're a little boy dreaming about playing in the World Cup. Then you're sitting next to them in the locker room"

Goalscoring debut... Dwyer was on target against Ghana in his first game for USA

Orlando City...Dwyer enjoyed two spells with the Florida club

"THEY PUT A GUN TO THE BACK OF MY HEAD AND TOOK ME OUT TO THE DESERT TO KILL ME"

Craig Butler, the father and agent of Leon Bailey, describes the extraordinary journey and sacrifices that he made for his son's career

Words: Ben Bocsak

Craig Butler was kneeling on scorching sand. The sun's rays burned his skin and all he could see around him was desert. Broken, bruised, dehydrated and scarred for life having come inches away from death, this was not the outcome he expected from an innocuous business trip to Mexico.

Nor the path he envisaged when he embarked on his quest to help his sons, including Leon Bailey, make it in Europe.

Merely a few years prior, Butler founded his academy, Phoenix All Stars, with the aspirations to change the landscape of Jamaican football and give impoverished kids a chance of a better life.

The team found early success, but trouble came when more established clubs in Jamaica's Premier Division tried to pluck away his best talent. This would culminate in Butler and Bailey's first hurdle on their mission to make it in the game.

"The Jamaica Football Federation fought hard to break up our academy," Butler recalls to *World Soccer*. "They tried to divide the players amongst the clubs that were members of JFF."

A staunch believer in his own methods, Butler refused to part ways with his players. The Jamaican FA subsequently banned his team, which forced Butler to make a drastic decision: "They made life so hard for us, we decided we had to leave Jamaica."

With his sons, Leon, Kyle, Kevaughn and Travis unable to play, Butler packed their bags and jetted off to Europe, with the scenic Austrian Alps in Salzburg his first destination.

Butler had made his sons stand in the local supermarket deep freezer in Jamaica, but even that could not prepare them for the frosty February temperatures.

"It was freezing cold," Butler shudders. "We did not come prepared. There were no places to buy jackets in Jamaica. The boys wore layers, T-shirts on top of T-shirts."

Butler's goal was to find his sons a professional football club and kick-start their careers. But in an unfamiliar landscape, it was difficult to find people who would give them a chance.

On their first day, they trekked to Salzburg's academy complex on the outskirts of the city. Initially, he was greeted by bemused faces at the gates but, as Butler insisted and begged for Salzburg to give his boys a chance, the club's academy director agreed.

The trial did not go according to plan: "During the trial, the boys froze on the

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field. They couldn't walk, let alone run. It was too much. I asked the director to give us more time to adapt, but he said no."

For the next few weeks, Butler and his sons travelled around Austria, where they would receive similar rejections.

"We went to almost every club in Austria," Butler recalls. "All the time the Europeans would say: 'Jamaica? You mean *Cool Runnings*?' Or they would ask if we smoked weed. No one believed talented footballers came out of Jamaica."

Those first few months in Austria were a difficult adaptation period. Butler had to work odd jobs because of his status as an unregistered resident in the country. He would clean toilets and go without food in order to make sure his sons were fed.

"It was so hard. The food was different. We didn't speak German, and we had nowhere to live. We went from hostel to hostel. I had to take on jobs under the table to feed the boys."

During his spare time, Butler would take his sons to local parks to train. It was there, in a fortuitous encounter, that he met a club director from Austria's second tier, USK Anif, who liked what he saw and was willing to give Butler's boys a chance.

Breakthrough... Bailey made his name at Genk

USK Anif signed all of Butler's sons, and they quickly made their mark. Leon ended the season as the side's top goalscorer, with Kyle not far behind him. The duo led the Austrian side's Under-15s to the cup final to set up a showdown with Red Bull Salzburg.

"They won 4-2 in the final," Butler remembers proudly. "Leon scored two or maybe three, and Kyle got three assists."

By then, Butler no longer had to beg for trials. Teams in Austria and around Europe were vying for his kids.

The best offer came from KRC Genk in Belgium. Around the time, the club had developed a reputation of bringing through exceptional talent and their offer was hard to refuse.

"I wanted the boys to

progress. Genk was famous for Kevin De Bruyne, Christian Benteke and Thibaut Courtois. The technical training skills they had in the academy were what the boys needed to get to the next step."

For a brief time, life in Belgium was good: Butler and his sons had a permanent place to stay, Leon and Kyle were making good progress at Genk's academy, and Butler landed a sales role with an Austrian company called Kickomat.

But just as their fortunes seemed to change for the better, Butler found himself loaded into a truck and mobbed by gangsters in Mexico, almost 10,000km away from his sons, during an innocuous business trip.

"I was walking around like I used to walk around when I was at Toshiba, with my nice suit and briefcase, and they just came out of nowhere and scraped me off the street.

"They put a gun to the back of my head, beat me, took all my money, and they took me out to the desert to kill me."

Butler is convinced his only saviour were the passports he kept of his children in his briefcase.

"They asked me: 'What are these?' and I said those are my children. The guy told me to go down on my knee. I refused. So, he hit me with the side of the rifle and I broke my knee. Another hit me on the side of the head. Then I heard them talking between themselves.

"They came back and told me to close my eyes and they put a gun to my head. They told me if I opened my eyes, they were going to shoot me."

Butler kept his eyes shut for 40 minutes, expecting his attackers to pull the trigger at any moment. When he finally opened them, he found himself alone in the desert.

"As far as I could see to the right, as far as I could see to the left, behind me and in front of me was desert."

It took around three days for locals to discover Butler. In that time, he came face to face with a rattlesnake and survived without water. By the time he was taken into hospital, his kidneys were close to shutting down.

"I kept telling myself I had to get back to the boys."

In Belgium, Leon and his brothers did not know what had happened to Butler. They survived thanks to Butler's adoptive son, Travis, who tended to the boys while Butler was away.

After Butler recovered, he returned to Belgium, but his residency was rejected and he had fallen out with Genk over personal matters. In 2013, Butler and his sons returned to Jamaica to train with Phoenix.

Jamaica...Bailey made his international debut for Jamaica at the 2019 Gold Cup

Despite Leon Bailey's impressive performances in Europe, and interest from the likes of Chelsea and Ajax, the JFF refused to call him up to national youth sides.

Butler remembers one frustrating occasion, where he and Leon sat in the stands alongside a scout from Ajax.

> "As far as I could see to the right, as far as I could see to the left, behind me and in front of me was desert"

"When the Ajax scout was asked by reporters whether he had seen anyone interesting at the game, he said no, but there was someone interesting sitting next to him in the stands."

It was clear a return to Europe was necessary. When Bailey had turned 18, and could legally sign for clubs abroad, Butler packed their bags and flew to Slovakia to join Ajax's affiliate, Trencin.

Butler and his sons spent only a few months in Slovakia before Genk came calling again, and this time, the Belgian club gave Butler an offer he could not refuse.

It took just weeks for Bailey to break into the Belgian side's first team and only 18 months to move for pastures new in Germany. The dream has always been the Premier League, which Aston Villa were happy to oblige this summer.

At Villa, Leon Bailey has begun with aplomb, and Butler believes Bailey's positive start to life in England is just the beginning.

"Leon's goal is to become one of the top players in the world. And because of everything we went through, I know Leon cannot be stopped."

Back home, Butler has not stopped his work with Phoenix. As well as working as Bailey's agent, he is still running day-to-day life in his academy. On Phoenix's recent tour to England Butler's academy beat leading academies like Crystal Palace and Aston Villa, which has seen some of his boys receive European interest.

Butler is hoping Bailey's influence can inspire other Jamaican talent from Phoenix to follow in his footsteps.

"Thanks to our work, we have talents ready to break through into the professional landscape who are aiming to follow Leon's path."

Looking back at the arduous journey that has helped Butler and Bailey reach the top, Butler is adamant he would not change a thing.

"Had we not fought, none of this would be possible."

Prodigies...Leon and his brother Kyle in Genk's academy

Glenn Moore

The road to Australia & New Zealand 2023

One-sided World Cup qualifiers demonstrates the imbalance of women's game

Thrashing...England beat Northern Ireland 4-0 at Wembley

England's 2023 Women's World Cup qualifier in Latvia in mid-October was an attack v defence training exercise masquerading as a competitive international.

While Latvia failed to register any shots, England had 58 – one every 95 seconds, including injury time. Given the time lost fetching the 37 wayward shots, and re-setting for kick-off after each of England's ten goals, the Lionesses were having a shot roughly every minute the ball was in play.

This was not surprising. England's footballers are well-paid, full-time professionals that benefit from the funds and expertise of leading men's clubs such as Chelsea, Manchester City, Manchester United and Arsenal. Latvia's players are part-timers who fit training around their jobs. The same applied to Luxembourg, also beaten 10-0 by England, all but one of the North Macedonia team beaten 8-0, and several of the Northern Ireland team defeated 4-0.

Four matches into World Cup qualifying England have a 32+ goal difference and average 44 shots per match, while Mary Earps, their goalkeeper in all four matches, has made one save.

Statistically it represents a great start for new head coach Sarina Wiegman, but realistically she has learned little about her new charges that is relevant to the looming priority of the 2021 European Championship.

As for the vanquished opponents, while there are positive aspects to playing household names and in major stadia, being thrashed takes a lot of the fun out of it. If 10-0 matches do little for the development of the winners, they are even less helpful to the losers.

Nor are England's one-sided matches exceptional. Of the 91 European qualifiers played in September and October, just over a fifth were won by seven goals or more, with double figures scored in six different games.

As Chelsea manager Emma Hayes observed while on co-commentary duties for England versus Latvia:

> "Something needs to be done – 10-0 games are not good for the game"
>
> Chelsea manager Emma Hayes

"Something needs to be done – 10-0 games are not good for the game."

Something, it seems, will be done with Nadine Kessler, UEFA's head of women's football, admitting the process will "be examined very closely and we will see an improvement in the future".

Imbalance...Belgium hammered Albania 7-0 in September

The former Germany international midfielder added: "We need to really take a close look to have more evenly-matched matches, but also to have some opportunities to still see where's the bar and to compete against the very best."

UEFA used to filter the weakest teams out, as happens in several other confederations. For the 2019 World Cup, the lowest 16 nations went into pre-qualifying with five emerging to join the 30 seeded teams. Of the 140 matches subsequently played in qualifying only nine were won by a margin of seven goals or more, and all but one of those were against two teams, Moldova and Faroe Islands.

This time all 53 entrants went straight into qualifying, but with the richer western nations putting greater resources into women's football the gap is getting bigger and it shows.

It seems some form of pre-qualifying may be back on the agenda, perhaps with a women's version of the Nations League being introduced alongside. Though, as Hayes added, the long-term solution is "all about what FIFA and UEFA can do to divert funds to grow countries like Latvia and their leagues. A team like Latvia needs more funding, more support."

2023 WOMEN'S WORLD CUP QUALIFYING UPDATE

The 2023 finals will feature 32 teams, up from 24 at the 2019 finals. Co-hosts Australia and New Zealand qualify automatically and 27 teams progress directly through qualifying.

Ten others go into a complex process of inter-confederation play-offs (ICPO), held in Australia and New Zealand in February 2023, producing the final three qualifiers.

For this ninth Women's World Cup, 173 countries entered, up from 144 in 2015.

Hosts...Australia and New Zealand both qualify automatically

AFRICA

Four direct qualifiers + two play-off places

The four semi-finalists at the 12-team Africa Women Cup of Nations (to be played in July 2022) will qualify automatically, with two of the quarter-finalists entering ICPO. With the qualifying draw for AWCON mostly done on a geographical, rather than seeded basis, there are some heavyweight ties. Nigeria, Africa's top-ranked team, put out fourth-ranked Ghana in the first round and face fifth-ranked Ivory Coast in February's second round. Equatorial Guinea (sixth) meet Tunisia (seventh).

ASIA

Six direct qualifiers (including hosts Australia) + two play-off places

The Asian Cup (see round-up) doubles up as the qualifying tournament. The four semi-finalists gain a World Cup place, the beaten quarter-finalists play-off for the remaining automatic places and ICPO entries, with the format adjusted to take into account Australia's automatic qualification as co-hosts. North Korea, the top-ranked Asian nation, withdrew from World Cup qualifying due to COVID-19.

CONCACAF

Four direct qualifiers + two play-off places

The semi-finalists at the Women's CONCACAF Championship, to be held in July 2022, qualify and two quarter-finalists go into ICPO. Canada and USA are seeded into the championship with six teams joining them from a qualification process that runs from November 2021 to April 2022.

SOUTH AMERICA

Three direct qualifiers + two play-off places

Qualification will be through the Copa America Femenina to be held in Colombia, July 2022.

OCEANIA

Co-hosts New Zealand + one play-off place

With New Zealand qualifying as co-hosts one team will go into ICPO, probably whoever New Zealand defeat in the final of the OFC Women's Nations Cup, in July 2022, which doubles up as World Cup qualifying.

EUROPE

11 direct qualifiers + one play-off place

The nine group winners qualify with runners-up going into a play-off process producing two qualifiers and a third team into ICPO. The tightest group is likely to be Group G, with Switzerland and Italy vying to win the section, though Russia could push Denmark in Group E, while the Dutch were surprisingly held at home by the Czechs in Group C.

Round-up

Euro 2022 draw...the ceremony in Manchester was a star-studded event

KIND DRAW FOR ENGLAND

Hosts England were handed a relatively benign draw for the 2022 Euros, paired in Group A with Norway, Austria and Northern Ireland. Holders Netherlands drew Olympic finalists Sweden, Russia and Switzerland. The "group of death" is Group B, containing eight-times winners Germany, 2017 runners-up Denmark, a Spanish side built around Champions League winners Barcelona, and Finland. The remaining group has France, Italy, Belgium and Iceland.

The tournament kicks off with England v Austria at Old Trafford on July 6 and ends at Wembley on July 31 with eight other venues used, including Premier League grounds Brighton, Southampton and Brentford.

France, Poland, Sweden, Ukraine and a four-nation Scandinavian bid have all expressed an interest in hosting Euro 2025. Bids are due by October 2022 with the decision two months later.

AUSSIES FACE EX-COACH IN INDIA

The draw for the 12-team Women's Asian Cup, to be held in India from January 20 to February 6, put the hosts in a fascinating geo-political group with China, Taiwan and debutants Iran. Favourites Australia were drawn with Thailand, Indonesia (who are making their return after a 32-year absence) and a Philippines team led by their former coach Alen Stajcic. Rivals Japan and South Korea were also paired, with Myanmar and Vietnam making up their group. All games will be in Maharashtra, at Mumbai, Navi Mumbai and Pune.

Farewell... USA legend Carli Lloyd

EVERTON SAY BONJOUR TO VASSEUR

Everton have appointed Jean-Luc Vasseur to replace the fired Willie Kirk. Vasseur steered Lyon to their fifth successive Champions League and 14th successive French title in 2020, but was fired when they failed to retain either the following season.

Champions League winner... Jean-Luc Vasseur

KANSAS CITY GO WITH THE FLOW

Kansas City will construct a $70 million, 11,000-seater stadium on the banks of the Missouri river, to open in 2024, and will now be known as Kansas City Current, in reference to the river's flow. The team finished bottom of NWSL this season, the franchise's first back in Kansas City after three years in Utah.

LLOYD LEAVES INTERNATIONAL STAGE

Carli Lloyd has called time on her international career aged 39, having added Olympic bronze to two gold medals. Lloyd also won two World Cups, scoring a hat-trick in the opening 16 minutes of the 2015 final. She won 316 caps for USA scoring 134 goals, and made her final appearance in a 6-0 win over South Korea in October.

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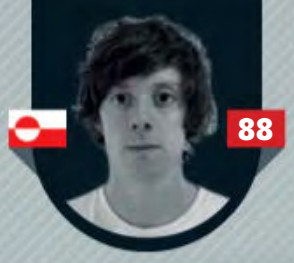

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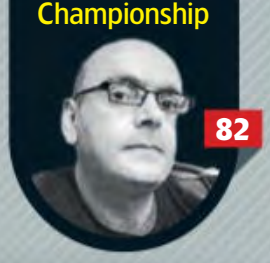

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PLUS

The beautiful game...on the world's largest island
(credit: Mads Pihl, Visit Greenland)

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2021-22 A-League Men preview...Tony Popovic returns

The month in numbers

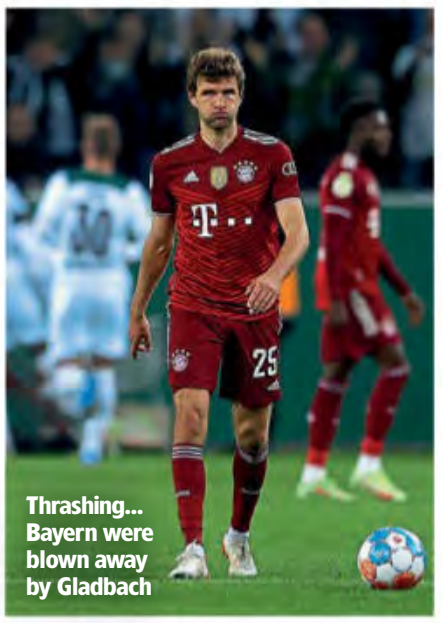
The facts and stats that have caught our eye in the world of football this month...

1,602

Games managed by Neil Warnock, breaking the all-time English professional record, in his final match before being sacked by Middlesbrough.

£1.1 bn

The reported value of the new Premier League TV deal with US broadcasters.



Thrashing... Bayern were blown away by Gladbach

43

Bayern Munch's 5-0 loss away to Borussia Monchengladbach was their worst defeat in 43 years, and their biggest German Cup defeat of all time.

£160m

Reported value of the 27 per cent stake in West Ham United, which has been purchased by Czech billionaire Daniel Kretinsky, who will join the Hammers' board.

£60m

Amount that a ban on betting companies sponsoring football shirts would cost the Premier League clubs in total.

35

Managers to have taken charge of over 1,000 professional matches in the modern era of English football after David Moyes passed the milestone in November.

107

Total Premier League goals scored by Liverpool's Mohamed Salah before November's international break, taking him past Didier Drogba as the league's highest-scoring African player of all time.

5

British football clubs that will take part in a safe-standing trial from January 2022, according to the minister for sport Nigel Huddleston.

199

Games that it took Alfredo Morelos to reach a century of goals for Rangers.

1,000

Karim Benzema's strike against Shakhtar Donetsk was Real Madrid's 1,000th Champions League goal – the first club to pass the milestone.

400

League goals scored by Zlatan Ibrahimovic after he netted in Milan's 2-1 win at Roma.

233

Brazil caps won by legendary midfielder Formiga, who recently announced her international retirement.

Expanding...West Ham United's London Stadium

2,500

The plan to expand West Ham United's London Stadium would see it increase by 2,500 seats.

6

Roma's 6-1 defeat to Norwegians Bodo/Glimt was the first time in Jose Mourinho's career that one of his teams had conceded six goals.

44

Number of spot-kicks it took for lower-level Midlands side Old Wulfrunians to beat Lane Head 19-18 on penalties – a new English record.

€500m

Estimated cost of Feyenoord's new stadium, forcing the club to cancel plans to move away from their current Rotterdam home.

19

Number of league titles won by KI of Klaksvik in the Faroe Islands – five behind the all-time record held by HB of Torshavn – after winning the latest Betri-deildin.

4

Years that Alexis Sanchez's Champions League goal drought lasted, with his strike against Sheriff Tirapsol in November his first in the competition since February 2017.

Drought over... Sanchez

Brazil legend... Formiga at the 1999 World Cup

1

Patson Daka became the first Zambian player to score a hat-trick in a major European competition when he struck all four goals in Leicester City's 4-3 win against Spartak Moscow.

Marshall Islands

STEVE MENARY

Defying isolation

Bringing football to the Pacific island nation

Defying isolation... players on Majuro

Halfway between Hawaii and Australia in eastern Micronesia, the Marshall Islands is one of the last countries in the world untouched by football. Basketball and wrestling dominate the Pacific chain but a group of islanders from the capital, Majuro, are defying isolation and poor facilities to get football played.

Mike Slinger, an Australian businessman, had organised regular games after coming to live on Majuro in the early 1990s. The island is home to half of the Marshall Islands' 59,000 population, but only measures 3.7 square miles and does not even have a pitch.

Games were played on any available space and eventually petered out. But a new Marshall Islands Soccer Federation was formed in December 2020 with Shem Livai, chief commercial officer at the islands' energy company, as president.

Claire Loeak, assistant attorney and niece of the former president, Christopher Loeak, is also on board and a first general assembly was held on January 29. British coach Paul Watson sent out a box of kit in the spring and games are played regularly at Delap Park.

Facilities remain a problem but the lack of a pitch may change. The Marshall Islands is hosting the 2022 multi-sport Micronesia Games and a $7.5 million sports stadium is being developed on reclaimed land in Majuro Lagoon.

"We hope to see a full-size soccer pitch soon," says MISF vice-president Divine Waiti, a local attorney originally from the Solomon Islands, where the game is well established.

"Currently, there are no formal clubs formed as yet. The aim is to develop the sports amongst the schools and communities, and eventually establish clubs to compete at the national level. In the future, we may be looking at hosting tournaments for the surrounding Micronesian groups such as Kiribati, Nauru, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau and maybe Tuvalu."

The MISF has met the with local public school systems to get football on the curriculum and is looking for help running clinics to train teachers on Majuro.

Another 15,000 people also live in Ebeye Island, which is part of Kwajalein Atoll and home to a US army base. Unlike Majuro, Kwajalein has a proper pitch and an organised local league, which culminated this autumn with play-offs and regular winners FC Swell defeating Bako 4-2 in the men's final. In the women's final, Spartans – a team from the local high school – beat Go Green Go 6-3.

The Marshall Islands is hosting the 2022 multi-sport Micronesia Games and a $7.5 million sports stadium is being developed on reclaimed land in Majuro Lagoon

Kwajalein Atoll... a match on the US Army Garrison
Credit: Jordan Vinson, The Kwajalein Hourglass

Kwajalein is 430 kilometres away from Majuro and external funding for development would help. Waiti adds: "It is one of [our] goals to develop towards becoming an associate member of the Oceania Football Confederation. This is something that we would like to work towards in the development of soccer in the Marshall Islands."

Unfortunately for aspiring footballers in the islands, their position as one of the last countries in the world left unrecognised by football's authorities looks set to continue.

"OFC is not currently working with the Marshall Islands and there are no plans to at this stage," says a confederation spokesperson. "OFC's focus right now is on its own Member Associations and working towards the confederation's goal of qualifying two Oceania teams to the FIFA World Cups in 2026-27."

Qatar

SAMINDRA KUNTI

Arab Cup preview

Questions over Qatar's human rights issues refuse to go away on the eve of the World Cup dress rehearsal tournament

It seems like only yesterday that on a cold afternoon in December 2010, Sepp Blatter and his executive committee awarded the 2022 World Cup – much to the bewilderment of other bidders, observers and fans – to Qatar. As always, FIFA was simply following the money.

Now, in December 2021, FIFA will stage the tenth edition of the Arab Cup, a Confederations Cup replacement, as a dress rehearsal for Qatar 2022.

Blatter and his cast of villains exited the stage to be replaced by the ruthless regime of Gianni Infantino but, amid all the apprehension over the direction the global game is heading in, the lead-up to the 2022 World Cup remains overshadowed by a single, major concern: Qatar's human rights records.

Earlier this year, Norwegian club Tromso whipped up a storm of protest when they expressed disgust at the "corruption and modern slavery" surrounding the Qatar World Cup following *The Guardian*'s report that 6,500 migrant workers from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have died since 2010.

The Gulf emirate has seen a decade of super-acceleration, burning money like there is no tomorrow: $220 billion in total, $7bn of which has been in World Cup-related development. "Cooled" stadiums, moored cruise ships and tent camps in the desert are all part of the plan to deliver a 27-day extravaganza. No expenses have been spared.

To deliver the infrastructure, Qatar has relied on migrant workers, who, often, toil in the baking heat for little pay and without legal protection. Near the Lusail Stadium, the mammoth

Arab Cup final host... Al Bayt Stadium in Al Khor, northern Qatar

venue for the World Cup final, 4,000 labourers earn about $350 per month, get one day off per week, and are entitled to a flight ticket home once a year, according to the Supreme Committee for Legacy and Delivery (SC).

The Qatari organisers argue that workers have benefited from labour reforms because of the World Cup, particularly due to the abolition of the infamous *Kafala* system, which tied foreign workers to their employer. Human Rights Watch, however, is concerned that these new laws are not being enforced properly.

A paper reform, then? Recent high-profile cases have highlighted how fragile life can be in Qatar for workers. Kenyan rights activist and security guard Malcolm Bidali was detained for weeks by local authorities. Norwegian magazine *Josimar* detailed the ordeal of former SC official Abdullah Ibhais, who was sentenced to five years imprisonment.

Among the public, there is some fatigue over stories of systemic abuses. Unfortunately, Western media outlets have found a sexier villain: Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom, with an abhorrent human rights record, lifted the years-long blockade against Qatar and will feature among the 16 finalists in the Arab Cup.

ABOVE: Hosts' manager...Qatar boss Felix Sanchez

ABOVE RIGHT: Protests...Norway have led the protests against Qatar hosting next year's World Cup

The Saudis will be among the favourites to win the tournament, having been drawn in Group C with Palestine, Jordan and Morocco. The North African participants – Egypt and Algeria meet in a tense derby in Group D – will be weakened without their European-based players, as clubs are not compelled to release their players. In Group B, Tunisia feature alongside the United Arab Emirates, Syria and Mauritania. Finally, Group A unites current and former Gulf Cup winners with Bahrain, Iraq, Oman and the hosts.

> **Near the Lusail Stadium, the mammoth venue for the World Cup final, 4,000 labourers earn about $350 per month [and] get one day off per week**

Since their swashbuckling Asian Cup win in 2019, Qatar have failed to replicate that form. Too often Felix Sanchez's team relies on the undisputed talent of both Ali Almoez and Akram Afif. The Spaniard has few other options. The Maroons need an uptick in fortunes, and this competitive tournament on home soil provides a timely opportunity to convince. They will be aiming for the final on Qatar Day (December 18, the anniversary of the country's unification) at the Al Bayt Stadium, a gleaming tent-shaped 60,000-seater and one of two World Cup venues to be inaugurated.

Qatar's operational readiness is not in doubt, but the global health crisis has presented organisers with an unprecedented problem: how to stage the world's biggest sporting event in a bio-secure way? The SC believes that the World Cup will be played at the tail end of the pandemic, and, as it stands, will require fans to be fully vaccinated, already an obligation for the Arab Cup. Ticket holders – at the time of writing just 53,000 had been sold – need to be double jabbed with a vaccine approved by local health authorities. To date, the four vaccines are Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson. In pandemic times, health and safety will be paramount for the success of both the dress rehearsal and the main event. The scrutiny, then, is once again on Qatar.

Saudi Arabia...one of the tournament favourites

THE DRAW

GROUP A
- Bahrain
- Iraq
- Oman
- Qatar

GROUP B
- Mauritania
- Syria
- Tunisia
- UAE

GROUP C
- Jordan
- Morocco
- Palestine
- Saudi Arabia

GROUP D
- Algeria
- Egypt
- Lebanon
- Sudan

India

JOHN DUERDEN

Mumbai City eye successive Indian Super League titles

After a long break, the ISL resumes with the City Football Group side favourites

The Indian Super League (ISL) no longer attracts the world-famous stars of a few years ago. There are no players to match Nicolas Anelka, Alessandro Del Piero or Robert Pires and no coaches of the stature of Zico. But the competition, which started in 2014, is settling down as it approaches its second season as the top tier of Indian football.

It has moved on from the short-term signings but there is an issue that remains: the overly long gap between short-term seasons. When the new campaign kicked off on November 19, it was eight months since Mumbai City, who finished the regular season on top of the table, won their first title with a 2-1 win over Kolkata's ATK Mohun Bagan in the final game of the championship play-off series.

At least there is a silver lining to the short campaigns. All the games will take place, once more, in the "bio-bubble" of Goa, though a move to United Arab Emirates or Qatar was briefly mooted. There are worse places to be confined in than the west coast state famous for beaches, fish curry and palm trees, but by the end, everyone had had enough of the hotels.

While more teams are needed to extend the season past the four-month mark, for now the focus is on the 11 that will participate and whether Mumbai can win a second title.

Goal machine... Roy Krishna *(Credit: Twitter @atkmohunbaganfc)*

Given such a lengthy close season, there are always going to be a high volume of players and coaches coming and going.

Fans will be delighted at the arrival of Igor Angulo, the Spaniard who was joint-top scorer with FC Goa last season. Just as significant is Des Buckingham joining as new boss. The 36-year-old former Reading and Oxford United goalkeeper has spent much of the past decade in New Zealand and Australia and leaves a job as assistant of Melbourne City to head north. Melbourne, like Mumbai, are a member of the City Football Group stable.

His arrival is a rare example of a British boss replacing a Spanish one. These days in India, it tends to be the other way round, as we have seen with Manolo Diaz coming into East Bengal to take over from Robbie Fowler, bringing the Spanish coaching contingent to five out of 11. The ex-Liverpool striker had a tough time in charge of the Kolkata giants who struggled near the bottom in their first ISL season. Often in trouble for speaking out of turn or his actions on the sidelines, Fowler left by mutual consent in September.

Kolkata rivals ATK Mohun Bagan, one of Asia's oldest clubs, were close runners-up last season after winning the title the season before. Keeping hold of the prolific Roy Krishna – the Fijian forward who was top scorer with 15 goals in 2019 and then struck 14 last term – is key. The Kolkata club have a pleasing blend of experienced foreign talent, such as new Finland international midfielder Joni Kauko, and local players.

When the new campaign kicked off on November 19, it was eight months since Mumbai City, who finished the regular season on top of the table, won their first title

Northeast United and Goa finished third and fourth, though some way behind the top two, to make the play-offs. Goa have lost the goals of Angulo and will hope that replacement striker Airam Cabrera, also from Spain, can fill that hole.

There will be plenty of attention on Northeast, the only club with an Indian coach. Khalid Jamil came in last February as a caretaker after Gerard Nus had been fired following a seven-game winless run. At the time, United were seventh but Jamil inspired a ten-game unbeaten streak that lifted the team to a third-place finish and a 3-2 aggregate loss in the play-off semi finals. Jamil now has the job permanently.

The likes of Hyderabad, who drew too many games last season, and Jamshedpur, led by Owen Coyle, just missed out on the top four last time and will be aiming for the play-offs, while Bengaluru will be hoping that the legendary Sunil Chhetri, who has 80 international goals, will still be banging them in domestically at the age of 37.

Kerala Blasters, one of the early ISL success stories with big crowds and title challenges have slipped over the years and finished second-bottom last time. Serbian boss Ivan Vukomanovic is the latest man to occupy the hot seat that once hosted David James, Steve Coppell, Peter Taylor, Terry Phelan and Rene Meulensteen.

Chennaiyin struggled for goals last season and there is hope that Polish striker Lukasz Gikiewicz can make a difference this time around. Odisha were adrift at the bottom last time around despite the 12 goals from Diego Mauricio. The Brazilian has since left, leaving new coach Kiko Ramirez with a big job in the east.

New arrival... Mumbai City coach Des Buckingham

Joni Kauko...the Finn played at Euro 2020

Australia

SIMON HILL

A-League season preview

Big changes on and off the pitch in Australia ahead of the 2021-22 season, which began on November 19

It's all change for football in Australia ahead of the new season: the A-League is now the A-Leagues.

With the Women's World Cup coming to Australia and New Zealand in 2023, the men's and women's competition (previously known as the W-League), will now run under the same name, in order to give the women's competition equal billing.

While this could cause some confusion, it's hoped the arrival of league sponsors (the men's has already acquired Isuzu-UTE) will provide a clear enough differentiation.

Not that they will be entirely separate entities, with the introduction of a new, additional trophy: the Club Championship, where the men's, women's and the A-League youth teams' results will be combined to find the overall winner.

The game has a new broadcast partner too. After 16 years with Fox Sports, Channel 10 – and its streaming service, Paramount Plus – have taken over for the new campaign.

On the pitch, Perth Glory's capture of former England international, Daniel Sturridge, provided the biggest talking point of the off-season. Sturridge's friendship with another ex-Liverpool player, Brad Jones (who has also signed on at Glory) helped swing the deal, and brings a long overdue marquee signing to the league.

Sturridge hasn't played competitively since a spell at Trabzonspor in 2020, and key to his success may well be how he adapts to playing on hard pitches in the summer months, and the heavy travel schedule that Perth-based players must endure. However, with Andy Keogh and Bruno Fornaroli also on board, coach Richard Garcia now arguably has the best striking trio in the competition.

Sturridge's arrival means the end of Diego Castro's six-year spell in Western Australia. Castro has been one of the A-League's best-ever imports, and leaves after contributing 49 goals across 136 games.

Another legend, Besart Berisha, is also leaving after a two-year spell with Western United. Berisha was an unknown when he arrived in 2011, but proved to be an inspirational signing by then-Brisbane Roar coach, Ange Postecoglou. Ten years, and three clubs later, he departs as the league's highest-ever scorer with 142 goals and having won four championships.

Western have turned to youth to replace Berisha, with Dylan Wenzel-Halls arriving from Brisbane, along with Noah Botic, who returns to Australia after two years in Germany with Hoffenheim. New coach John Aloisi still has a 38-year-old Alessandro Diamanti to call upon, but the expansion club is still without a

caption

Marquee signing... Sturridge scored eight goals for England

proper home ground – their proposed venue in Wyndham, originally due to completion sometime in 2022, remains un-built.

Reigning champions, Melbourne City, will run Perth Glory close for the best front three in the competition. Australian international Mat Leckie has been repatriated after a lengthy stint in Germany, and he will team up in attack with fellow Socceroos Andrew Nabbout and Jamie Maclaren, last year's Golden Boot winner with 25 goals.

Beaten Grand Finalists, Sydney FC, haven't been as active in the market – although the talented Max Burgess has returned to the club after missing virtually the entire 2020-21 campaign due to a contractual dispute with his previous club, Western United.

Central Coast Mariners surprised everyone by finishing third last year, at which point head coach, Alen Stajcic, promptly quit. His replacement is ex-Sheffield United midfielder, Nick Montgomery, who has added former Western Sydney Wanderer, Nicolai Muller and French midfielder, Beni N'Kololo to his squad.

Going the other way is Daniel de Silva, who has joined Macarthur FC. Head coach, Ante Milicic, has added real quality in his bid to go one better after reaching the semis in their debut season. Ulises Davila, Craig Noone, Tomi Juric, Jordon Mutch and Al-Hassan Toure are all on board, although English striker Matt Derbyshire has returned to Cyprus, and ex-Socceroo, Mark Milligan, has retired.

Brisbane Roar's big off-season acquisition is Juan Lescano, the Argentine who was once a junior at both Liverpool and Real Madrid, but has been latterly playing in Russia for Yenisey Krasnoyarsk.

Adelaide United have brought club legend, Isaias, home from Qatar, while George Blackwood is another familiar face after a season with Oldham Athletic. Western Sydney Wanderers, meanwhile, celebrate their ten-year anniversary with a clutch of new signings – Socceroos Rhys Williams, Dimi Petratos and Terry Antonis among them – as they vow to avoid another season of under-achievement.

Wellington Phoenix may yet have to start the season in a "hub" in Australia due to COVID, and that's not the only curve ball that manager Ufuk Talay has been thrown. Former Newcastle United defender, Steven Taylor, announced his retirement in September, amid rumours of a fall out with the club over his contract.

Big improvements are expected at Newcastle Jets and Melbourne Victory – last year's bottom two.

Both are under new leadership. Arthur Papas has made a clutch of signings to revive the Jets, including defenders Jordan Elsey and Matt Jurman, and Georgian striker, Beka Mikeltadze.

Meanwhile, Victory – who "won" their first-ever wooden spoon last season – have brought Tony Popovic back home from his ill-fated stint in Greece with Xanthi.

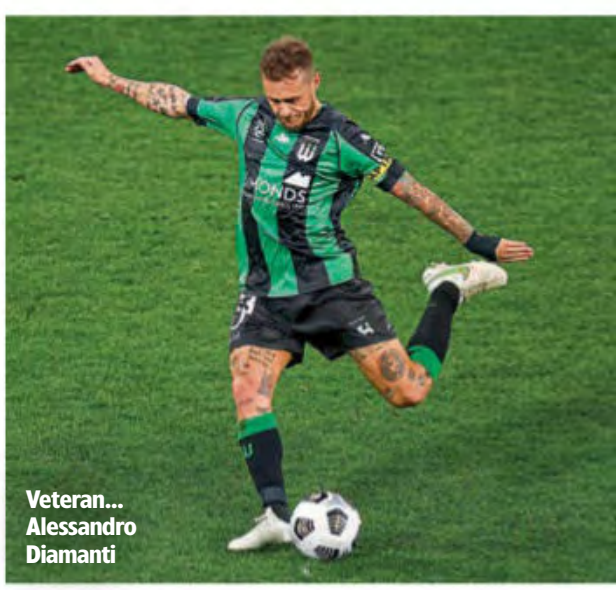
Popovic is a proven winner in Australian circles and, to date, he has signed 11 new players. These include Socceroos, Jason Davidson, Jason Geria, Matt Spiranovic and Chris Ikonomidis.

It'll be a huge surprise if Victory aren't one of the big-movers on the field; just as the game hopes the big moves off it pay dividends, after several years of stagnation in terms of crowds and TV audiences.

Perth Glory's capture of former England international, Daniel Sturridge, provided the biggest talking-point of the off-season

Champions... Melbourne City won the title last season

Returning... Tony Popovic



Veteran... Alessandro Diamanti

United States

JAMES NALTON

MLS regular season review

New England Revolution head into the Major League Soccer play-offs as Supporters' Shield winners after a record-breaking league season

In their 26th year in Major League Soccer, New England Revolution finally lifted the Supporters' Shield trophy, doing so as the league's standout side by some distance.

As one of the original MLS teams, the club are as old as the league itself, but until this year they had never topped the pile at the end of the regular season.

Their wily 70-year-old head coach, Bruce Arena, has now won the Shield with three of the four MLS clubs he's managed in his illustrious career, having previously claimed titles with D.C. United and LA Galaxy.

A former lacrosse player who was capped by the United States soccer team as a goalkeeper, Arena guided his side to the top of the regular-season standings in his third season in charge, doing so in the most convincing manner.

The Revolution broke records for total points in a season with 73, surpassing Los Angeles FC's 2019 total of 72.

They finished 19 points clear of their nearest rivals in the Eastern Conference – last season's Shield winners Philadelphia Union – and 12 points ahead of Western Conference leaders Colorado Rapids in the overall league standings.

Their Spanish attacking midfielder Carles Gil was the league's standout player, creating chances from all

Winners...captain and playmaker Carles Gil lifts the Supporters' Shield

Wily...New England Revolution coach Bruce Arena

manner of situations in what was one of the most impressive displays of playmaking the league has seen. In total he notched up 13 assists, one behind league leader Djordje Mihailovic, Montreal's American playmaker.

In any normal campaign the Revolution's achievements would be the primary narrative, but the Rapids' performance in the West was just as notable.

Despite having the lowest wage bill in MLS, their coach Robin Fraser was able to guide a tight-knit, well-organised side to the top of the conference for the first time in the club's history.

New England themselves are below mid-table when it comes to salary spend, details of which are released to the public by the players' union, the MLSPA, each year, so plenty of credit is due to both the Rapids and the Revolution. But no one tipped Fraser's side to top their conference, with most giving them an outside chance of qualifying for the play-offs at best.

At the other end of the scale, the high-profile and highly-paid stars at LA Galaxy, along with their local rivals LAFC, didn't even qualify for the post-season event.

The Los Angeles teams missing out is a story in itself, as is Vancouver Whitecaps and Real Salt Lake qualifying for the play-offs in their stead.

At one stage the Whitecaps were bottom of the Western Conference, but Vanni Sartini's work after being appointed interim head coach in August, along with the introduction of Scottish attacking midfielder Ryan Gauld, transformed them from one of the worst teams in the league to one of the best.

Real Salt Lake, meanwhile, were widely predicted to win nothing but a wooden spoon. They secured a play-off spot on a dramatic final day thanks to an injury-time winner against Sporting Kansas City, fittingly scored by one of the league's more unheralded standout players, Damir Kreilach.

In the East, last year's MLS Cup winners Columbus Crew endured a difficult campaign, missing out on the play-offs altogether, while 2020 expansion side Inter Miami also missed the cut, continuing to struggle under head coach Phil Neville.

Nashville joined MLS at the same time as Miami and have been the more organised and impressive of the two, qualifying for the play-offs in successive seasons. They improved on last year's seventh-place finish in the East by securing third.

Their attacking midfielder, Hany Mukhtar, was arguably the closest challenger to Gil in this season's MVP race, recording 16 goals and ten assists.

The league's top scorers came from the East, too. New York City's Valentin "Taty" Castellanos claimed the Golden Boot ahead of D.C. United's Ola Kamara by virtue of bagging more assists, after both players netted 19 times.

Castellanos' goals were enough to secure a play-off spot for NYCFC, but D.C. missed out to a New York Red Bulls side whose impressive end-of-season run saw them lose just once in 12 games.

New England Revolution broke records for total points in a season with 73, surpassing Los Angeles FC's 2019 total of 72

In the previous nine seasons only one team, Toronto FC in 2017, have won the Supporters' Shield and MLS Cup in the same year. Regular-season dominance doesn't always transfer to the play-offs, but the exceptional New England will be hoping to be another exception.

Joint-top scorers...Valentin Castellanos (L) and Ola Kamara (R)

Disappointment... Chicharito's 17 goals weren't enough for LA Galaxy to reach the MLS play-offs

South Asia

JOHN DUERDEN

India and Chhetri light up the SAFF Championship in the Maldives

India's domination of the tournament continues with eighth competition victory

The 13th edition of the South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) Championship took place in October and became something of the Sunil Chhetri show as the legendary striker led India to a fifth triumph in the last eight tournaments. The final saw a comfortable 3-0 win over Nepal in the Maldivian capital of Male with the 37-year-old getting the all-important first to cement the best player award as well as the top goalscorer.

Five goals from five games moved Chhetri, once linked to Rangers and Queen's Park Rangers, on to 80 in total, level with Lionel Messi and second only to Cristiano Ronaldo in the active international goal charts. It also moved the diminutive forward past Pele's tally of 77 for Brazil.

When the pressure was on, Chhetri came good, as he has done so often

Celebrations... India players lift the trophy

Award-winning... Sunil Chhetri was the tournament's top scorer and MVP

Hosts' hero...Maldives legend Ali Ashfaq

since making his international debut back in 2005. There were only five teams this time, with Pakistan – who should have been hosts when the tournament was originally scheduled to take place back in 2020 – currently banned by FIFA, and Afghanistan's on-going political turmoil. The remaining quintet competed in a round-robin group in the Maldives with the top two going through to the final.

Five goals from five games moved Chhetri on to 80 in total, level with Lionel Messi and second only to Cristiano Ronaldo in the active international goal charts

Going into the last group game between India and Maldives there was only one place remaining. Nepal had already booked a place in their first-ever final. India had to win, while the hosts would have gone through with a draw.

It was billed as a clash between the two striking veterans of South Asian football. As well as Chhetri, there was Ali Ashfaq, the hero of Maldives football for much of the century. At 36, "The Man of Steel", once linked with a move to Benfica, is a year younger than his Indian counterpart. Going into the game however, he had scored a record 22 goals in the tournament's history.

"Ashfaq and Sunil have been playing outstandingly for a long time," said Maldives coach Ali Suzain before the game. "Both of them gave a lot to football as well as their countries. One [Sunil] is a great player in the box and he can even take advantage of a little opportunity in the box. The number of goals is proof of Sunil's standard. Ashfaq is also an excellent player playing with great agility and effectiveness in and outside the box."

Both got on the scoresheet. India had to win and took the lead through Manvir Singh just after the half hour. Then Ashfaq equalised from the spot on the stroke of half-time to send the red hordes inside the compact stadium wild. After the break, however, Chhetri did what he does best, scoring two goals in quick succession to earn a place in the final, the first a fine half-volley and the second a header from the edge of the area.

It was something of a disappointing exit for the Maldives, who were looking for a third regional title. With Ashfaq surely on his last legs, a replacement striker is their next priority.

India cared little and moved into the final to defeat Nepal 3-0. The result was rarely in doubt after Chhetri gave India the lead early in the second half, heading home in the rain after a perfectly-timed run into the area. Within seconds India had doubled their lead and were on their way to the title. The Blue Tigers have bigger game to hunt than South Asia and are focusing on qualification for the 2023 Asian Cup.

Despite the loss, it was a successful tournament for Nepal and a first-ever appearance in the final. Hundreds of fans waited for the team at Kathmandu airport on the morning of October 18, as did the Nepali Police band. Head coach Abdullah Al-Mutairi was conspicuous by his absence however. The Kuwaiti's contract was due to finish four days later and he was, according to reports, waiting to see whether an offer would be made. Most fans wanted him, and his greater emphasis on attacking football, to stay, and he duly signed a new three-year deal a couple of weeks later.

Bangladesh finished fourth and were competitive under temporary coach Oscar Bruzon, taking over after the departure of English boss Jamie Day in September. It has been reported that Day, appointed in 2018, will return after a temporary release as he is still under contract but that remains to be seen. As expected Sri Lanka, the weakest nation in South Asia and ranked all the way down at 205, finished fifth and last. The headlines, however, belonged to Sunil Chhetri.

Finalists...Nepal line up for their final clash with India in Male, Maldives

Photos credit: saffederation.org

CONCACAF Champions League

MARTIN DEL PALACIO LANGER

Monterrey victorious on home soil

America defeated in third all-Mexican final in five years

Despite a format change, a long hiatus during the summer, and some surprise results in the early stages, ultimately the 2021 edition of the CONCACAF Champions League ended in the most predictable way.

Not only did two Mexican teams reach the final (they have dominated the tournament during the last 16 editions), but the ones who made it were the two most successful clubs of the last ten years; America, champions in 2015 and 2016, and Monterrey, winners in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2019.

There was, then, a lot of expectation around the match, although the two teams could not have arrived with more disparate trajectories. Monterrey had the advantage of playing at home, but seemed to be badly out of form having lost four consecutive league games in a row. On the contrary, their rivals arrived with an eight-point advantage at the top of LigaMX.

Managed by Argentine Santiago Solari, and without great stars in their squad, America had been effective

Campeones... **Monterrey players celebrate with their trophy**

rather than spectacular during the season, but their results left no room for doubt. Monterrey, for their part, had greater star power but had shown much less cohesion under the command of Javier Aguirre, the only Mexican coach to have managed in the UEFA Champions League.

For this reason, when the opening whistle sounded at the BBVA Stadium, full to its maximum capacity, it was the visitors who were expected to have control of the match and create the best chances, but the reality was very different.

In the third minute, Mexican international Carlos Rodriguez had the first clear opportunity for the hosts with a header that went just over the crossbar. A minute later, America's iconic goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa made a great save from his international team-mate Rogelio Funes Mori to preserve the clean sheet.

Monterrey kept up the pressure, and finally got their reward in the ninth minute. After a good move on the left, Jesus Gallardo crossed towards Funes Mori; America's Uruguayan defender, Sebastian Caceres, inexplicably missed his clearance, and *Los Rayados*' striker had only to slot the ball into the empty net to open the scoring.

> **It was the visitors who were expected to have control of the match and create the best chances, but the reality was very different**

From that moment on the hosts ceded the initiative to the away side, seeking to expand their advantage with counter-attacks. Despite having possession, America failed to put it to good use in the first half hour and it was Monterrey who had the better chances.

Shot-stopper... America keeper Guillermo Ochoa dives at the feet of Maximiliano Meza

Finally, in the final 15 minutes of the first half, the *Aguilas* were able to create some danger, but goalkeeper Esteban Andrada was attentive to efforts from Richard Sanchez and Henry Martin.

Things did not change much in the second half but, as the minutes ticked by, the visitors began to fall into despair while Monterrey took the opportunity to get closer and closer to a decisive goal.

In the 65th minute, America captain Ochoa made a spectacular save from Funes Mori, and ten minutes from the final whistle Caceres made up for his earlier mistake by clearing a goal-bound shot from Dutchman Vincent Janssen off the goal-line.

America, despite arriving to the match in a good moment and with greater confidence, were never really in a position to win and, when the referee whistled to end the match, Monterrey were crowned deserved champions, thus winning their fifth title – all in the last ten years. Despite the defeat, *Las Aguilas* remain the competition's most successful club with seven titles.

This victory, in addition, was particularly important for Monterrey for moral reasons. Last year, their arch-rivals, Tigres, not only won the CONCACAF Champions League but also became the first Mexican club to reach the final of the Club World Cup, where they lost 1-0 to Bayern Munich, thus obtaining the bragging rights in the football-crazed city of Monterrey.

Now, *Los Rayados* will travel to the United Arab Emirates in early 2022 with the idea of trying to improve on what their city rivals did. Their fans are already dreaming of a final against Chelsea, but with a better outcome than their rivals could manage last year.

Match winner...Funes Mori also won the tournament's Best Player award

Number five...this was Monterrey's fifth Champions League trophy

Africa

MARK GLEESON

CAF Champions League preliminaries wrap-up

Qualifying rounds conclude to leave 16 teams left for the group stage

caption

The group phase of this season's African Champions League starts in February, once the Cup of Nations finals in Cameroon are completed, but the 16-team field was settled in mid-November.

When the draw takes place, just before Christmas, there will be plenty of pedigree, with eight former winners involved, as well as three rookie clubs. Algeria, Angola, Egypt, Morocco, South Africa, Sudan and Tunisia all have two representatives, emphasising the strength of their respective leagues and, at the same time highlighting how west Africa has been hit badly by the mass exodus of playing talent to every corner of the globe. No clubs from Ghana, the Ivory Coast, Nigeria or Senegal advanced from the two knockout rounds and, in a surprise, the Democratic Republic of Congo is not represented either after the shock elimination of TP Mazembe

to AmaZulu of South Africa.

A goalless draw in the first leg in Durban was followed by a 1-1 draw at Mazembe's fortress in Lubumbashi. AmaZulu, coached by former Celta Vigo and Blackburn Rovers striker Benni McCarthy, could well have registered a rare success for an away team in the Congolese city before an equaliser in the 95th minute, but still went through on the away goals rule.

Jwaneng Galaxy became only the second team in 26 years from Botswana to reach the group stage after a stunning comeback in Dar es Salaam against Simba of Tanzania.

Galaxy lost the home leg of their tie 2-0, only to bounce back a week later with a 3-1 away triumph. It is made even more remarkable by the fact that Botswana are yet to resume their domestic league since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and so Galaxy subsist on a diet of friendly games and training camps, hardly ideal for engendering the match fitness that allows them to compete at the top level.

Defending champions Al Ahly had little problem disposing of Gendarmie Nationale (USGN) from Niger 7-2 on aggregate, with Egyptian compatriots Zamalek matching the five-goal margin as they won home and away against Kenyan champions Tusker.

Holders...Al Ahly reached the group stage with ease

Upset...AmaZulu manager Benni McCarthy

When the [group stage] draw takes place, just before Christmas, there will be plenty of pedigree, with eight former winners involved

In contrast, Algeria's two representatives both needed the away goals rule to go through. Entente Setif had struggled in the first round to get past newcomers Fortune FC from the Gambia and also blew it again in the second round when facing FC Nouadhibou from Mauritania. They got the decisive goal six minutes from the end of the second leg. Chabab Belouizdad are through to the group phase for a second season after a narrow success over ASEC Abidjan.

ASEC were African champions in 1998 but have long lost their lustre. The same is true of Accra's Hearts of Oak, who won the Champions League 21 years ago. They got hammered 6-1 away by Wydad Casablanca in their second-round tie, conceding all the goals inside 61 minutes and only grabbing a late consolation in a comprehensive thrashing.

Wydad and their neighbours Raja Casablanca will be looking to break Al Ahly's hegemony again this season, along with the South African giants Mamelodi Sundowns, who sauntered through past Maniema Union of DR Congo.

Raja had been surprisingly knocked out at this stage last season, dropping down to the Confederation Cup, which they went on to win.

But they took no chances this time round and won 2-0 home and away against LPRC Oilers from Liberia.

Also through are Horoya from Guinea despite the difficulties posed by the September military coup in the West African country. It led to the Confederation of African Football stopping Guinea's national team and clubs from hosting home games, resulting in their three other representatives in the Champions League and Confederation Cup having to forfeit their home ties and play a single away match instead.

As a result, they were eliminated, but Horoya had a bye into the Champions League second round and so avoided that obstacle. By the time they hosted Stade Malien, Guinea had the ban on hosting continental matches rescinded and Horoya were able to forge a 3-1 aggregate triumph.

Guinean football had its golden era in the mid-1970s but Horoya's owner Antonio Souare has pumped much money into the club and looked to restore them to their past glories. They are now looking to step up and become real contenders with Souare investing in more players and bringing Lamine N'Diaye in as coach. The former Senegal captain was the coach at TP Mazembe when the Congolese club rebuilt their reputation in similar circumstances.

Impressive...Horoya overcame tough circumstances to qualify
Credit: Instagram @horoyaac

Greenland

JOE PHELAN

The beautiful game on the world's largest island

Joe Phelan takes a closer look at how football can thrive on one of the most inhospitable places on the planet

FIFA figures suggest that approximately 250 million people around the globe play football on a regular basis, while a 2018 study found that almost half (43 per cent) of the world's population considers themselves a fan of the game.

It should come as no surprise, then, that football is just as beloved in secluded pockets of humanity as it is in South America, Europe and Africa. And, when it comes to isolation, you'd struggle to find anywhere more remote, more off the beaten track, than Greenland.

Bordered by both the Arctic and Atlantic oceans, Greenland – part of the Kingdom of Denmark – is a place of biting winds and expansive glaciers, unexplored frozen tundra and difficult to reach fishing hamlets. It is perhaps not the place that springs to mind when thinking about thriving football hotspots, but the sport is a central pillar in many Greenlandic communities, providing a place to socialise, exercise and unwind.

Traditionally, numerous things have held back the development of football in Greenland. For starters, its population is a mere 56,367, meaning that if every man, woman and child took a trip to Wembley there would still be more than 33,000 seats to fill.

Also, Greenland is not particularly well suited to a game predominantly played on grass. In fact, there have never been, nor are there currently, any grass football pitches on the island – players either head to one of the 11 artificial turf pitches dotted around Greenland, or they play on tamped down rectangles of dirt.

There is also the small matter of Greenland's lack of infrastructure. There is no road that connects all of the main towns – in fact, the majority of settlements can only be reached by boat – and only two countries (Denmark and Iceland) fly commercially to Greenland.

But where there's a will there's a way, and Greenland's people certainly have an abundance of will.

More than ten per cent of Greenland's population is registered as a football player. The island boasts 76 different teams – all of which are amateur and run by volunteers – and due to the island's colossal size (it is nine times bigger than the UK) has had to develop a rather unique domestic tournament format. It is, quite simply, an impressive feat of logistics and planning, a tournament that is run almost in its

Picturesque...a football pitch in Qaqortoq, southern Greenland *(credit: Aningaaq R. Carlsen, Visit Greenland)*

entirety by people who do it solely because they love the sport.

Greenland's winters are long and dark, while the summers are fleeting. Football can only realistically be played between May and September, so to ensure a complete domestic season can be fulfilled, five regional tournaments take place, which whittle down the competitors until just eight teams remain. These sides then compete in a final tournament, which usually takes place in the capital city of Nuuk. The tournament is made all the more complicated by the fact that nautical journeys between settlements take, at the very least, a few hours.

The most successful team in the history of the tournament – currently known as the Coca-Cola GM Football Championship – is B-67 Nuuk, who have won the competition 13 times. Though they are far and away Greenland's most recognisable name, they have never competed on the European stage owing to Greenland not being a member of UEFA.

However, if the Greenland FA and current head coach of the national team, Morten Rutkjaer, have their way, this could be set to change.

[Greenland's] population is a mere 56,367, meaning that if every man, woman and child took a trip to Wembley there would still be more than 33,000 seats to fill

Greenland is not a member of UEFA or FIFA, meaning that its domestic champions cannot enter European tournaments, nor can its national team compete in major international competitions. There are numerous hurdles standing in Greenland's way before membership to either organisation is liable to be granted, but work is underway to ensure they can be overcome.

Nanortalik Championships...players from Nanortalik and Narsarmiit *(credit: Mads Pihl, Visit Greenland)*

The first issue is that Greenland is not a sovereign nation. FIFA tends to want its members to be independent, though the 2016 admittance of Gibraltar, a British Overseas Territory, shows that this rule is perhaps not as stringent as it used to be.

The second is that Greenland does not have a national stadium with the seating capacity or the facilities that both UEFA and FIFA demand. Currently, the national team's home ground is the Nuuk Stadium, which is deemed to have a capacity of 2,000. However, this figure simply relates to how many people could viably stand along the perimeter of the pitch during a game – there are no stands, and the amenities are basic.

Official blueprints have been drawn up for a new national stadium, currently dubbed the Arktisk Stadion (Arctic Stadium), but largely as a consequence of economic difficulties associated with the coronavirus pandemic, the project has stalled. But Greenlanders are hopeful this will only be a temporary pause.

Until then, the largest tournament open to Greenland is the Island Games – the next iteration of which is set to take place in 2023 – which sees islands including Bermuda, Jersey, Menorca and Saint Helena compete in a tournament not too dissimilar to the World Cup, but on a significantly smaller scale.

Rutkjaer, who recently celebrated his one-year anniversary as Greenland's head coach, is positive regarding the future of football on the island.

"Greenland is a fantastic place full of incredible people," he tells *World Soccer*. "People here eat, drink and breathe football, and that has really changed my perspective of what being Greenland manager means.

"My day-to-day job is to help develop the national side and to improve the players, but the overarching project is so much bigger. I want Greenlanders to have a team they can take pride in, and I want the younger generations to aspire to play for a national team that competes on the biggest stage.

"In terms of the near future, the Island Games is something we are working towards. We will be undertaking tours of Spain and Denmark in 2022 to help us prepare, and I have confidence that we can do very well when the tournament comes around.

"There is so much potential here, but the project is huge, and it's going to take a long time to put down the foundations. Patience is key. I love the ambition of Greenland's FA; I am confident we are building something very special here, and I'm very proud to be part of it".

Tough conditions... a game on the Kulusuk sea ice in East Greenland *(credit: Mads Pihl, Visit Greenland)*

NOVEMBER 27-DECEMBER 24, 2021

Global diary

Games and dates to pencil in for the month ahead

(All kick-off times, if stated, are BST)

Saturday November 27

URUGUAY: The all-Brazilian Copa Libertadores final takes place at the Estadio Centenario in Montevideo, with holders Palmeiras facing 2020 winners Flamengo.

Up for the cup... Copa Libertadores trophy

GERMANY: Wolfsburg take on Borussia Dortmund in the Bundesliga race for the top four.

Sunday November 28

ENGLAND: In the Premier League, Chelsea host Manchester United.

Monday November 29

FRANCE: The day's Ligue 1 action begins with Saint-Etienne hosting PSG, before Marseille face Troyes.
ITALY: Maurizio Sarri returns to his old club as Lazio visit Napoli.
SPAIN: Sevilla will aim to kick-start their title challenge with a trip to the Bernabeu to face Real Madrid.

Tuesday November 30

ENGLAND: A packed midweek Premier League schedule begins with a relegation scrap between Newcastle United and Norwich City.
NORTHERN IRELAND: Northern Ireland's qualifying campaign for the Women's World Cup continues with a home game v North Macedonia.

Wednesday December 1

EUROPE: Women's World Cup qualifying continues with fixtures including England v Latvia, Spain v Scotland and France v Wales.
ENGLAND: The Merseyside derby sees Rafa Benitez's Everton play host to Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool.
FRANCE: There's a full line-up of Ligue 1 fixtures too, with Lyon, Marseille, PSG and Lille in action.

Thursday December 2

ENGLAND: Manchester United host Arsenal, while Tottenham Hotspur take on Brentford.
SCOTLAND: Celtic face Hearts in the Scottish Premiership.

Friday December 3

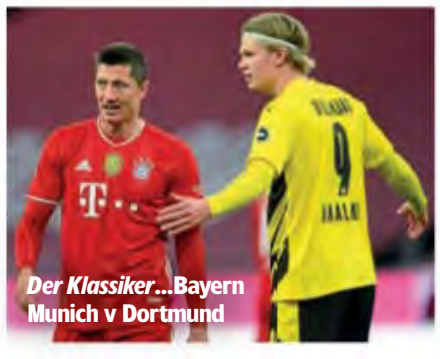
PORTUGAL: Benfica host Sporting in the Lisbon derby.
ENGLAND: There's a key battle at the top of the Championship, as Bournemouth manager Scott Parker visits his old club Fulham.
AUSTRALIA: A new season of the rebranded A-League Women begins.

Saturday December 4

GERMANY: In the Bundesliga it's *Der Klassiker*, as Dortmund take on Bayern Munich at Signal Iduna Park.
ITALY: Jose Mourinho faces his old club Internazionale for the first time since returning to Italy, as the champions visit Roma.
ENGLAND: West Ham United face Chelsea in a London derby.

Sunday December 5

ENGLAND: Leeds United v Brentford, Manchester United v Crystal Palace and Aston Villa v Leicester City are among the Premier League fixtures.
SINGAPORE: Singapore v Myanmar kicks off the AFF Championship.


Der Klassiker...Bayern Munich v Dortmund

Monday December 6

ENGLAND: Everton take on Arsenal in *Monday Night Football*.
JAPAN: The J.League season concludes, with Kawasaki Frontale already crowned champions.
CONCACAF: The CONCACAF League final first leg takes place, with the second leg a week later.

Tuesday December 7

EUROPE: The Champions League group stage concludes. Most eyes will be on Group D, where Real Madrid play Inter and Sheriff Tiraspol continue their European adventure with a trip to Shakhtar.

Wednesday December 8

EUROPE: Bayern v Barcelona is the standout tie, but there should be plenty of tension in Groups F and G too, which are wide open.

Champions...Kawasaki Frontale

Thursday December 9

EUROPE: The Europa League and Europa Conference League group stages also conclude. Napoli face Leicester, Real Sociedad host PSV and Tottenham play Rennes. In the Women's Champions League, Arsenal take on holders Barcelona.

Saturday December 11

SPAIN: The Madrid derby sees Atletico visit the Bernabeu.
ENGLAND: Steven Gerrard returns to Anfield as Aston Villa manager.
USA: The MLS Cup final takes place.

Sunday December 12

FRANCE: In Ligue 1, Paris Saint-Germain host Monaco.

Tuesday December 14

ENGLAND: In the Premier League, Brentford host Manchester United and Leeds visit Manchester City.
SAUDI ARABIA: Barcelona take on Boca Juniors in a friendly match marking the one-year anniversary of Diego Maradona's death.

Wednesday December 15

GERMANY: Monchengladbach v Eintracht Frankfurt is among the midweek Bundesliga fixtures.

Thursday December 16

ENGLAND: In the Premier League, Leicester take on Tottenham and Liverpool host Newcastle United.

Friday December 17

GERMANY: Bayern Munich take on Wolfsburg in the Bundesliga.

Saturday December 18

TURKEY: Istanbul rivals Fenerbahce and Besiktas go head-to-head.

Sunday December 19

NETHERLANDS: Feyenoord host Ajax in *De Klassieker*.
ITALY: Milan take on Napoli at the San Siro in a top-of-the-table clash in Serie A.
ENGLAND: Tottenham face Liverpool in the Premier League.

Tuesday December 21

ENGLAND: The EFL Cup last eight begins with Arsenal v Sunderland.

Wednesday December 22

ENGLAND: The remaining three EFL Cup quarter-finals take place.
ASIA: The two-legged semi-finals of the AFF Championship begin.

Thursday December 23

NETHERLANDS: PSV take on Go Ahead Eagles in the Eredivisie.

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SERIE A 2021-22

ATALANTA

GOALKEEPERS

1 Juan **MUSSO** (Arg) (27) 06.05.94
31 Francesco **ROSSI** (30) 27.04.91
51 Marco **SPORTIELLO** (29) 10.05.92

DEFENDERS

2 Rafael **TOLOI** (31) 10.10.90
3 Joakim **MAEHLE** (Den) (24) 20.05.97
6 Jose **PALOMINO** (Arg) (31) 05.01.90
8 Robin **GOSENS** (Ger) (27) 05.07.94
13 Giuseppe **PEZZELLA** (23) 29.11.97
19 Berat **DJIMSITI** (Alb) (28) 19.02.93
28 Merih **DEMIRAL** (Tur) (23) 05.03.98
33 Hans **HATEBOER** (Ned) (27) 09.01.94
42 Giorgio **SCALVINI** (17) 11.12.03
66 Matteo **LOVATO** (21) 14.02.00
77 Davide **ZAPPACOSTA** (29) 11.06.92

MIDFIELDERS

7 Teun **KOOPMEINERS** (Ned) (23) 28.02.98
11 Remo **FREULER** (Sui) (29) 15.04.92
15 Marten **DE ROON** (Ned) (30) 29.03.91
18 Ruslan **MALINOVSKIY** (Ukr) (28) 04.05.93
32 Matteo **PESSINA** (24) 21.04.97
44 Andrea **OLIVERI** (18) 14.01.03
45 Federico **ZUCCON** (18) 01.04.03
59 Aleksei **MIRANCHUK** (Rus) (26) 17.10.95
88 Mario **PASALIC** (Cro) (26) 09.02.95

FORWARDS

9 Luis **MURIEL** (Col) (30) 16.04.91
72 Josip **ILICIC** (Svn) (33) 29.01.88
91 Duvan **ZAPATA** (Col) (30) 01.04.91
99 Roberto **PICCOLI** (20) 27.01.01

COACH

Gian Piero **GASPERINI** (63) 26.01.58

BOLOGNA

GOALKEEPERS

12 Marco **MOLLA** (Alb) (19) 19.06.02
22 Francesco **BARDI** (29) 18.01.92
23 Nicola **BAGNOLINI** (17) 14.03.04
28 Lukasz **SKORUPSKI** (Pol) (30) 05.05.91

DEFENDERS

2 Luis **BINKS** (Eng) (20) 02.09.01
3 Aaron **HICKEY** (Sco) (19) 10.06.02
4 Kevin **BONIFAZI** (25) 19.05.96
5 Adama **SOUMAORO** (Fra) (29) 18.06.92
6 Arthur **THEATE** (Bel) (21) 25.05.00
15 Ibrahima **M'BAYE** (Sen) (27) 19.11.94
25 Gabriele **CORBO** (21) 11.01.00
29 Lorenzo **DE SILVESTRI** (33) 23.05.88
35 Mitchell **DIJKS** (Ned) (28) 09.02.93
66 Wisdom **AMEY** (16) 11.08.05
77 Ebenezer **ANNAN** (Gha) (19) 21.08.02

MIDFIELDERS

8 Nicolas **DOMINGUEZ** (Arg) (23) 28.06.98
14 Nicolas **VIOLA** (32) 12.10.89
16 Kingsley **MICHAEL** (Nga) (22) 26.08.99
17 Gary **MEDEL** (Chi) (34) 03.08.87
21 Roberto **SORIANO** (30) 08.02.91
30 Jerdy **SCHOUTEN** (Ned) (24) 12.01.97
32 Mattias **SVANBERG** (Swe) (22) 05.01.99
55 Emanuel **VIGNATO** (21) 24.08.00
82 Kacper **URBANSKI** (Pol) (17) 07.09.04

FORWARDS

7 Riccardo **ORSOLINI** (24) 24.01.97
9 Marko **ARNAUTOVIC** (Aut) (32) 19.04.89
10 Nicola **SANSONE** (30) 10.09.91
11 Andreas **SKOV OLSEN** (Den) (21) 29.12.99
19 Federico **SANTANDER** (Par) (30) 04.06.91
20 Sydney **VAN HOOIJDONK** (Ned) (21) 06.02.00
31 Matias **ROCCHI** (19) 23.10.02
74 Gianmarco **CANGIANO** (20) 16.11.01
91 Diego **FALCINELLI** (30) 26.06.91
99 Musa **BARROW** (Gam) (23) 14.11.98

COACH

Sinisa **MIHAJLOVIC** (Srb) (52) 20.02.69

CAGLIARI

GOALKEEPERS

1 Simone **ARESTI** (35) 15.03.86
28 Alessio **CRAGNO** (27) 28.06.94
31 Boris **RADUNOVIC** (Srb) (25) 26.05.96
34 Eugenio **FUSCO** (18) 19.05.03

DEFENDERS

2 Diego **GODIN** (Uru) (35) 16.02.86
4 Martin **CACERES** (Uru) (34) 07.04.87
12 Raoul **BELLANOVA** (21) 17.05.00
15 Giorgio **ALTARE** (23) 09.08.98
22 Charalampos **LYKOGIANNIS** (Gre) (28) 22.10.93
23 Luca **CEPPITELLI** (32) 11.08.89
25 Gabriele **ZAPPA** (21) 22.12.99
29 **DALBERT** (Bra) (28) 08.09.93
33 Adam **OBERT** (Svk) (19) 23.08.02
40 Sebastian **WALUKIEWICZ** (Pol) (21) 05.04.00
44 Andrea **CARBONI** (20) 04.02.01

MIDFIELDERS

6 Marko **ROG** (Cro) (26) 19.07.95
8 Razvan **MARIN** (Rou) (25) 23.05.96
14 Alessandro **DEIOLA** (26) 01.08.95
16 Kevin **STROOTMAN** (Ned) (31) 13.02.90
18 Nahitan **NANDEZ** (Uru) (25) 28.12.95
20 Gaston **PEREIRO** (Uru) (26) 11.06.95
21 Christian **OLIVA** (Uru) (25) 01.06.96
24 Paolo **FARAGO** (28) 12.02.93
26 Nicolo **CAVUOTI** (18) 04.04.03
27 Alberto **GRASSI** (26) 07.03.95
35 Riccardo **LADINETTI** (20) 20.12.00

FORWARDS

9 Keita **BALDE** (Sen) (26) 08.03.95
10 **JOAO PEDRO** (Bra) (29) 09.03.92
17 Diego **FARIAS** (Bra) (31) 10.05.90
30 Leonardo **PAVOLETTI** (33) 26.11.88
32 Damir **CETER** (Col) (24) 02.11.97

COACH

Walter **MAZZARRI** (60) 01.10.61

EMPOLI

GOALKEEPERS

1 Samir **UJKANI** (Kvx) (33) 05.07.88
12 Klemen **HVALIC** (Svn) (19) 18.04.02
13 Guglielmo **VICARIO** (25) 07.10.96
22 Jacopo **FURLAN** (28) 22.02.93

DEFENDERS

3 Riccardo **MARCHIZZA** (23) 26.03.98
6 Simone **ROMAGNOLI** (31) 09.02.90
20 Riccardo **FIAMOZZI** (28) 18.05.93
26 Lorenzo **TONELLI** (31) 17.01.90
30 Petar **STOJANOVIC** (Svn) (26) 07.10.95
33 Sebastiano **LUPERTO** (25) 06.09.96
34 Ardian **ISMAJLI** (Alb) (25) 30.09.96
42 Mattia **VITI** (19) 24.01.02
65 Fabiano **PARISI** (21) 09.11.00

MIDFIELDERS

5 Leo **STULAC** (Svn) (27) 26.09.94
8 Liam **HENDERSON** (Sco) (25) 25.04.96
10 Nedim **BAJRAMI** (Alb) (22) 28.02.99
21 Samuele **DAMIANI** (23) 30.01.98
23 Kristjan **ASLLANI** (Alb) (19) 09.03.02
27 Szymon **ZURKOWSKI** (Pol) (24) 25.09.97
28 Samuele **RICCI** (20) 21.08.01
32 Nicolas **HAAS** (Sui) (25) 23.01.96
35 Tommaso **BALDANZI** (18) 23.03.03

FORWARDS

7 Leonardo **MANCUSO** (29) 26.05.92
9 Patrick **CUTRONE** (23) 03.01.98
11 Federico **DI FRASCO** (27) 14.06.94
17 Emmanuel **EKONG** (Swe) (19) 25.06.02
19 Andrea **LA MANTIA** (30) 06.05.91
25 Filippo **BANDINELLI** (26) 29.03.95
99 Andrea **PINAMONTI** (22) 19.05.99

COACH

Aurelio **ANDREAZZOLI** (68) 05.11.53

FIORENTINA

GOALKEEPERS

1 Pietro **TERRACCIANO** (31) 08.03.90
25 Antonio **ROSATI** (38) 26.03.83
69 Bartlomiej **DRAGOWSKI** (Pol) (24) 19.08.97

DEFENDERS

2 Lucas **MARTINEZ QUARTA** (Arg) (25) 10.05.96
3 Cristiano **BIRAGHI** (29) 01.09.92
4 Nikola **MILENKOVIC** (Srb) (24) 12.10.97
17 Aleksa **TERZIC** (Srb) (22) 17.08.99
23 Lorenzo **VENUTI** (26) 12.04.95
29 Alvaro **ODRIOZOLA** (Spa) (25) 14.12.95
55 Matija **NASTASIC** (Srb) (28) 28.03.93
98 **IGOR** (Bra) (23) 07.02.98

MIDFIELDERS

5 Giacomo **BONAVENTURA** (32) 22.08.89
8 Riccardo **SAPONARA** (29) 21.12.91
10 Gaetano **CASTROVILLI** (24) 17.02.97
14 Youssef **MALEH** (Mar) (23) 22.08.98
15 Erick **PULGAR** (Chi) (27) 15.01.94
18 Lucas **TORREIRA** (Uru) (25) 11.02.96
24 Marco **BENASSI** (27) 08.09.94
32 Alfred **DUNCAN** (Gha) (28) 10.03.93
34 Sofyan **AMRABAT** (Mar) (25) 21.08.96
42 Alessandro **BIANCO** (19) 01.10.02

FORWARDS

7 Jose **CALLEJON** (Spa) (34) 11.02.87
9 Dusan **VLAHOVIC** (Srb) (21) 28.01.00
22 Nicolas **GONZALEZ** (Arg) (23) 06.04.98
33 Riccardo **SOTTIL** (22) 03.06.99
67 Louis **MUNTEANU** (Rou) (19) 16.06.02
91 Aleksandr **KOKORIN** (Rus) (30) 19.03.91

COACH

Vincenzo **ITALIANO** (43) 10.12.77

GENOA

GOALKEEPERS

1 Adrian **SEMPER** (Cro) (23) 12.01.98
22 Federico **MARCHETTI** (38) 07.02.83
25 Rok **VODISEK** (Svn) (22) 05.12.98
35 Lorenzo **ANDRENACCI** (26) 02.01.95
57 Salvatore **SIRIGU** (34) 12.01.87

DEFENDERS

2 Stefano **SABELLI** (28) 13.01.93
3 Zinho **VANHEUSDEN** (Bel) (22) 29.07.99
4 Domenico **CRISCITO** (34) 30.12.86
5 Andrea **MASIELLO** (35) 05.02.86
13 Mattia **BANI** (27) 10.12.93
14 Davide **BIRASCHI** (27) 02.07.94
15 Johan **VASQUEZ** (Mex) (23) 22.10.98
50 Andrea **CAMBIASO** (21) 20.02.00
52 Nikola **MAKSIMOVIC** (Srb) (30) 25.11.91
66 Laurens **SERPE** (20) 07.02.01

MIDFIELDERS

10 Filippo **MELEGONI** (22) 18.02.99
11 Valon **BEHRAMI** (Sui) (36) 19.04.85
18 Paolo **GHIGLIONE** (24) 02.02.97
21 Ivan **RADOVANOVIC** (Srb) (33) 29.08.88
27 Stefano **STURARO** (28) 09.03.93
33 **HERNANI** (Bra) (27) 27.03.94
47 Milan **BADELJ** (Cro) (32) 25.02.89
65 Nicolo **ROVELLA** (19) 04.12.01
90 Manolo **PORTANOVA** (21) 02.06.00
93 Mohamed **FARES** (Alg) (25) 15.02.96
94 Abdoulaye **TOURE** (Fra) (27) 03.03.94
99 Pablo **GALDAMES** (Chi) (24) 30.12.96

FORWARDS

9 Felipe **CAICEDO** (Ecu) (33) 05.09.88
19 Goran **PANDEV** (Mkd) (38) 27.07.83
20 Caleb **EKUBAN** (Gha) (27) 23.03.94
23 Mattia **DESTRO** (30) 20.03.91
24 Flavio **BIANCHI** (21) 24.01.00
44 Aleksander **BUKSA** (Pol) (18) 15.01.03
91 Yayah **KALLON** (Sle) (20) 30.06.01

COACH

Andriy **SHEVCHENKO** (Ukr) (45) 29.09.76

INTERNAZIONALE

GOALKEEPERS

1 Samir **HANDANOVIC** (Svn) (37) 14.07.84
21 Alex **CORDAZ** (38) 01.01.83
97 Ionut **RADU** (Rou) (24) 28.05.97

DEFENDERS

2 Denzel **DUMFRIES** (Ned) (25) 18.04.96
6 Stefan **DE VRIJ** (Ned) (29) 05.02.92
11 Aleksandar **KOLAROV** (Srb) (36) 10.11.85
13 Andrea **RANOCCHIA** (33) 16.02.88
32 Federico **DIMARCO** (24) 10.11.97
33 Danilo **D'AMBROSIO** (33) 09.09.88
36 Matteo **DARMIAN** (31) 02.12.89
37 Milan **SKRINIAR** (Svk) (26) 11.02.95
95 Alessandro **BASTONI** (22) 13.04.99

MIDFIELDERS

5 Roberto **GAGLIARDINI** (27) 07.04.94
8 Matias **VECINO** (Uru) (30) 24.08.91
12 Stefano **SENSI** (26) 05.08.95
20 Hakan **CALHANOGLU** (Tur) (27) 08.02.94
22 Arturo **VIDAL** (Chi) (34) 22.05.87
23 Nicolo **BARELLA** (24) 07.02.97
24 Christian **ERIKSEN** (Den) (29) 14.02.92
38 Mattia **SANGALLI** (19) 27.02.02
77 Marcelo **BROZOVIC** (Cro) (29) 16.11.92

FORWARDS

7 Alexis **SANCHEZ** (Chi) (32) 19.12.88
9 Edin **DZEKO** (Bih) (35) 17.03.86
10 Lautaro **MARTINEZ** (Arg) (24) 22.08.97
14 Ivan **PERISIC** (Cro) (32) 02.02.89
19 Joaquin **CORREA** (Arg) (27) 13.08.94
48 Martin **SATRIANO** (Uru) (20) 20.02.01

COACH

Simone **INZAGHI** (45) 05.04.76

JUVENTUS

GOALKEEPERS

1 Wojciech **SZCZESNY** (Pol) (31) 18.04.90
23 Carlo **PINSOGLIO** (31) 16.03.90
36 Mattia **PERIN** (29) 10.11.92

DEFENDERS

2 Mattia **DE SCIGLIO** (29) 20.10.92
3 Giorgio **CHIELLINI** (37) 14.08.84
4 Matthijs **DE LIGT** (Ned) (22) 12.08.99
6 **DANILO** (Bra) (30) 15.07.91
11 Juan **CUADRADO** (Col) (33) 26.05.88
12 Alex **SANDRO** (Bra) (30) 26.01.91
17 Luca **PELLEGRINI** (22) 07.03.99
19 Leonardo **BONUCCI** (34) 01.05.87
24 Daniele **RUGANI** (27) 29.07.94
45 Koni **DE WINTER** (Bel) (19) 12.06.02

MIDFIELDERS

5 **ARTHUR** (Bra) (25) 12.08.96
8 Aaron **RAMSEY** (Wal) (30) 26.12.90
10 Paulo **DYBALA** (Arg) (28) 15.11.93
14 Weston **MCKENNIE** (USA) (23) 28.08.98
25 Adrien **RABIOT** (Fra) (26) 03.04.95
27 Manuel **LOCATELLI** (23) 08.01.98
30 Rodrigo **BENTANCUR** (Uru) (24) 05.06.97
44 Dejan **KULUSEVSKI** (Swe) (21) 25.04.00
46 Matias **SOULE** (Arg) (18) 15.04.03
47 Fabio **MIRETTI** (18) 03.08.03

FORWARDS

9 Alvaro **MORATA** (Spa) (29) 23.10.92
18 Moise **KEAN** (21) 28.02.00
20 Federico **BERNARDESCHI** (27) 16.02.94
21 **KAIO JORGE** (Bra) (19) 24.01.02
22 Federico **CHIESA** (24) 25.10.97

COACH

Massimiliano **ALLEGRI** (54) 11.08.67

LAZIO

GOALKEEPERS

1 Thomas **STRAKOSHA** (Alb) (26) 19.03.95
25 Pepe **REINA** (Spa) (39) 31.08.82
31 Marius **ADAMONIS** (Ltu) (24) 13.05.97
41 Alessio **FURLANETTO** (19) 07.09.02

DEFENDERS

3 **LUIZ FELIPE** (Bra) (24) 22.03.97
4 **PATRIC** (Spa) (28) 17.04.93
16 Dimitrije **KAMENOVIC** (Srb) (21) 16.07.00
19 Denis **VAVRO** (Svk) (25) 10.04.96
23 Elseid **HYSAJ** (Alb) (27) 02.02.94
24 Riza **DURMISI** (Den) (27) 08.01.94
26 Stefan **RADU** (Rou) (35) 22.10.86
33 Francesco **ACERBI** (33) 10.02.88
44 Romano **FLORIANI** (18) 27.01.03
83 Enzo **ADEAGBO** (Sui) (19) 11.01.02

MIDFIELDERS

5 Gonzalo **ESCALANTE** (Arg) (28) 27.03.93
6 Lucas **LEIVA** (Bra) (34) 09.01.87
8 Jean-Daniel **AKPA-AKPRO** (Civ) (29) 11.10.92
10 Luis **ALBERTO** (Spa) (28) 28.11.92
18 Luka **ROMERO** (Arg) (17) 18.11.04
20 Mattia **ZACCAGNI** (26) 16.06.95
21 Sergej **MILINKOVIC-SAVIC** (Srb) (26) 27.02.95
22 **JONY** (Spa) (30) 09.07.91
28 Andre **ANDERSON** (22) 23.09.99
29 Manuel **LAZZARI** (27) 29.11.93
32 Danilo **CATALDI** (27) 06.08.94
50 Marco **BERTINI** (19) 07.08.02
77 Adam **MARUSIC** (Mne) (29) 17.10.92
88 Toma **BASIC** (Cro) (25) 25.11.96

FORWARDS

7 Felipe **ANDERSON** (Bra) (28) 15.04.93
9 **PEDRO** (Spa) (34) 28.07.87
14 Bobby **ADEKANYE** (Ned) (22) 14.02.99
17 Ciro **IMMOBILE** (31) 20.02.90
27 Raul **MORO** (Spa) (18) 05.12.02
94 Vedat **MURIQI** (Kvx) (27) 24.04.94

COACH

Maurizio **SARRI** (62) 10.01.59

MILAN

GOALKEEPERS

1 Ciprian **TATARUSANU** (Rou) (35) 09.02.86
16 Mike **MAIGNAN** (Fra) (26) 03.07.95
77 Alessandro **PLIZZARI** (21) 12.03.00
83 Antonio **MIRANTE** (38) 08.07.83
90 Sebastiano **DESPLANCHES** (18) 11.03.03
96 Andreas **JUNGDAL** (Den) (19) 22.02.02

DEFENDERS

2 Davide **CALABRIA** (24) 06.12.96
5 Fode **BALLO-TOURE** (Fra) (24) 03.01.97
13 Alessio **ROMAGNOLI** (26) 12.01.95
14 Andrea **CONTI** (27) 02.03.94
19 Theo **HERNANDEZ** (Fra) (24) 06.10.97
20 Pierre **KALULU** (Fra) (21) 05.06.00
23 Fikayo **TOMORI** (Eng) (23) 19.12.97
24 Simon **KJAER** (Den) (32) 26.03.89
25 Alessandro **FLORENZI** (30) 11.03.91
46 Matteo **GABBIA** (22) 21.10.99

MIDFIELDERS

4 Ismael **BENNACER** (Alg) (23) 01.12.97
8 Sandro **TONALI** (21) 08.05.00
10 **BRAHIM DIAZ** (Spa) (22) 03.08.99
27 Daniel **MALDINI** (20) 11.10.01
33 Rade **KRUNIC** (Bih) (28) 07.10.93
41 Tiemoue **BAKAYOKO** (Fra) (27)17.08.94
56 Alexis **SAELEMAEKERS** (Bel) (22) 27.06.99
79 Franck **KESSIE** (Civ) (24) 19.12.96

FORWARDS

7 Samu **CASTILLEJO** (Spa) (26) 18.01.95
9 Olivier **GIROUD** (Fra) (35) 30.09.86
11 Zlatan **IBRAHIMOVIC** (Swe) (40) 03.10.81
12 Ante **REBIC** (Cro) (28) 21.09.93
17 Rafael **LEAO** (Por) (22) 10.06.99
30 Junior **MESSIAS** (Bra) (30) 13.05.91
64 Pietro **PELLEGRI** (20) 17.03.01

COACH

Stefano **PIOLI** (56) 19.10.65

NAPOLI

GOALKEEPERS

1	Alex **MERET**	(24) 22.03.97
12	Davide **MARFELLA**	(22) 15.09.99
16	Hubert **IDASIAK** (Pol)	(19) 03.02.02
25	David **OSPINA** (Col)	(33) 31.08.88
72	Valerio **BOFFELI**	(17) 04.09.04

DEFENDERS

2	Kevin **MALCUIT** (Fra)	(30) 31.07.91
3	Filippo **COSTA**	(26) 21.05.95
5	Juan **JESUS** (Bra)	(30) 10.06.91
6	Mario **RUI** (Por)	(30) 27.05.91
13	Amir **RRAHMANI** (Kvx)	(27) 24.02.94
22	Giovanni **DI LORENZO**	(28) 04.08.93
26	Kalidou **KOULIBALY** (Sen)	(30) 20.06.91
31	Faouzi **GHOULAM** (Alg)	(30) 01.02.91
44	Kostas **MANOLAS** (Gre)	(30) 14.06.91
59	Alessandro **ZANOLI**	(21) 03.10.00

MIDFIELDERS

4	Diego **DEMME** (Ger)	(30) 21.11.91
7	Eljif **ELMAS** (Mkd)	(22) 24.09.99
8	**FABIAN** (Spa)	(25) 03.04.96
20	Piotr **ZIELINSKI** (Pol)	(27) 20.05.94
68	Stanislav **LOBOTKA** (Svk)	(27) 25.11.94
99	Andre-Frank **ZAMBO ANGUISSA** (Cmr)	(26) 16.11.95

FORWARDS

9	Victor **OSIMHEN** (Nga)	(22) 29.12.98
11	Hirving **LOZANO** (Mex)	(26) 30.07.95
14	Dries **MERTENS** (Bel)	(34) 06.05.87
21	Matteo **POLITANO**	(28) 03.08.93
24	Lorenzo **INSIGNE**	(30) 04.06.91
33	Adam **OUNAS** (Alg)	(25) 11.11.96
37	Andrea **PETAGNA**	(26) 30.06.95

COACH

	Luciano **SPALLETTI**	(62) 07.03.59

ROMA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Rui **PATRICIO** (Por)	(33) 15.02.88
63	Pietro **BOER**	(19) 12.05.02
87	Daniel **FUZATO** (Bra)	(24) 04.07.97

DEFENDERS

2	Rick **KARSDORP** (Ned)	(26) 11.02.95
3	**IBANEZ** (Bra)	(23) 23.11.98
5	Matias **VINA** (Uru)	(24) 09.11.97
6	Chris **SMALLING** (Eng)	(32) 22.11.89
13	Riccardo **CALAFIORI**	(19) 19.05.02
18	Davide **SANTON**	(30) 02.01.91
19	Bryan **REYNOLDS** (USA)	(20) 28.06.01
20	Federico **FAZIO** (Arg)	(34) 17.03.87
23	Gianluca **MANCINI**	(25) 17.04.96
24	Marash **KUMBULLA** (Alb)	(21) 08.02.00
37	Leonardo **SPINAZZOLA**	(28) 25.03.93
56	Amir **FERATOVIC** (Svn)	(19) 08.06.02
58	Filippo **MISSORI**	(17) 24.03.04
65	Filippo **TRIPI**	(19) 06.01.02

MIDFIELDERS

4	Bryan **CRISTANTE**	(26) 03.03.95
7	Lorenzo **PELLEGRINI**	(25) 19.06.96
8	Gonzalo **VILLAR** (Spa)	(23) 23.03.98
17	Jordan **VERETOUT** (Fra)	(28) 01.03.93
22	Nicolo **ZANIOLO**	(22) 02.07.99
42	Amadou **DIAWARA** (Gui)	(24) 17.07.97
52	Edoardo **BOVE**	(19) 16.05.02
53	Alessio **RICCARDI**	(20) 03.04.01
55	Ebrima **DARBOE** (Gam)	(20) 06.06.01
59	Nicola **ZALEWSKI**	(19) 23.01.02
77	Henrikh **MKHITARYAN** (Arm)	(32) 21.01.89

FORWARDS

9	Tammy **ABRAHAM** (Eng)	(24) 02.10.97
11	Carles **PEREZ** (Spa)	(23) 16.02.98
14	Eldor **SHOMURODOV** (Uzb)	(26) 29.06.95
21	Borja **MAYORAL** (Spa)	(24) 05.04.97
64	Felix **AFENA-GYAN** (Gha)	(18) 19.01.03
92	Stephan **EL SHAARAWY**	(29) 27.10.92

COACH

	Jose **MOURINHO** (Por)	(58) 26.01.63

SALERNITANA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Vincenzo **FIORILLO**	(31) 13.01.90
12	Antonio **RUSSO**	(21) 01.02.00
22	Guido **GUERRIERI**	(25) 25.02.96
71	Jacopo **DE MATTEIS**	(18) 28.12.02
72	Vid **BELEC** (Svn)	(31) 06.06.90

DEFENDERS

3	Matteo **RUGGERI**	(19) 11.07.02
4	Pawel **JAROSZYNSKI** (Pol)	(27) 02.10.94
5	Freddie **VESELI** (Alb)	(29) 20.11.92
6	Stefan **STRANDBERG** (Nor)	(31) 25.07.90
13	Ramzi **AYA**	(31) 08.02.90
16	Sedrick **KALOMBO**	(26) 08.02.95
19	Luca **RANIERI**	(22) 23.04.99
23	Norbert **GYOMBER** (Svk)	(29) 03.07.92
24	Wajdi **KECHRIDA** (Tun)	(26) 05.11.95
26	Luka **BOGDAN** (Cro)	(25) 26.03.96
31	Riccardo **GAGLIOLO** (Swe)	(31) 28.04.90
33	Filippo **DELLI CARRI**	(22) 03.05.99

MIDFIELDERS

2	Mamadou **COULIBALY** (Sen)	(22) 03.02.99
7	Franck **RIBERY** (Fra)	(38) 07.04.83
8	Andrea **SCHIAVONE**	(28) 23.02.93
14	Francesco **DI TACCHIO**	(31) 20.04.90
18	Lassana **COULIBALY** (Mli)	(25) 10.04.96
20	Grigoris **KASTANOS** (Cyp)	(23) 30.01.98
21	Nadir **ZORTEA**	(22) 19.06.99
22	Joel **OBI** (Nga)	(30) 22.05.91
28	Leonardo **CAPEZZI**	(26) 28.03.95

FORWARDS

9	Federico **BONAZZOLI**	(24) 21.05.97
11	Milan **DURIC** (Bih)	(31) 22.05.90
15	Cedric **GONDO** (Civ)	(25) 25.11.96
25	Simeon **NWANKWO** (Nga)	(29) 07.05.92
63	Edoardo **VERGANI**	(20) 06.02.01

COACH

	Stefano **COLANTUONO**	(59) 23.10.62

SAMPDORIA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Emil **AUDERO**	(24) 18.01.97
30	Nicola **RAVAGLIA**	(32) 12.12.88
33	Wladimiro **FALCONE**	(26) 12.04.95

DEFENDERS

3	Tommaso **AUGELLO**	(27) 30.08.94
4	Julian **CHABOT** (Ger)	(23) 12.02.98
12	Fabio **DEPAOLI**	(24) 24.04.97
15	Omar **COLLEY** (Gam)	(29) 24.10.92
19	Radu **DRAGUSIN** (Rum)	(19) 03.02.02
22	Maya **YOSHIDA** (Jap)	(33) 24.08.88
24	Bartosz **BERESZYNSKI** (Pol)	(29) 12.07.92
25	Alex **FERRARI**	(27) 01.07.94
29	Nicola **MURRU**	(26) 16.12.94

MIDFIELDERS

2	Morten **THORSBY** (Nor)	(25) 05.05.96
5	Adrien **SILVA** (Por)	(32) 15.03.89
6	Albin **EKDAL** (Swe)	(32) 28.07.89
8	Valerio **VERRE**	(27) 11.01.94
14	Ronaldo **VIEIRA** (Eng)	(23) 19.07.98
16	Kristoffer **ASKILDSEN** (Nor)	(20) 09.01.01
20	Mohamed **IHATTAREN** (Ned)	(19) 12.02.02
28	Gerard **YEPES** (Spa)	(19) 25.08.02
38	Mikkel **DAMSGAARD** (Den)	(21) 03.07.00
70	Simone **TRIMBOLI**	(19) 19.04.02
87	Antonio **CANDREVA**	(34) 28.02.87

FORWARDS

9	Ernesto **TORREGROSSA**	(29) 28.06.92
10	Francesco **CAPUTO**	(34) 06.08.87
11	Riccardo **CIERVO**	(19) 01.04.02
23	Manolo **GABBIADINI**	(30) 26.11.91
27	Fabio **QUAGLIARELLA**	(38) 31.01.83
99	Nik **PRELEC** (Svn)	(20) 10.06.01

COACH

	Roberto **D'AVERSA**	(46) 12.08.75

SASSUOLO

GOALKEEPERS

24	Giacomo **SATALINO**	(22) 20.05.99
30	Samuele **VITALE**	(19) 20.08.02
47	Andrea **CONSIGLI**	(34) 27.01.87
56	Gianluca **PEGOLO**	(40) 25.03.81

DEFENDERS

3	Edoardo **GOLDANIGA**	(28) 02.11.93
5	Kaan **AYHAN** (Tur)	(27) 10.11.94
6	**ROGERIO** (Bra)	(23) 13.01.98
13	Federico **PELUSO**	(37) 20.01.84
17	Mert **MULDUR** (Tur)	(22) 03.04.99
19	Filippo **ROMAGNA**	(24) 26.05.97
21	Vlad **CHIRICHES** (Rou)	(32) 14.11.89
22	Jeremy **TOLJAN** (Ger)	(27) 08.08.94
31	Gianmarco **FERRARI**	(29) 15.02.92
77	Giorgos **KYRIAKOPOULOS** (Gre)	(25) 05.02.96

MIDFIELDERS

4	Francesco **MAGNANELLI**	(37) 12.11.84
7	Jeremie **BOGA** (Civ)	(24) 03.01.97
8	Maxime **LOPEZ** (Fra)	(23) 04.12.97
10	Filip **DURICIC** (Srb)	(29) 30.01.92
14	Pedro **OBIANG** (Eqg)	(29) 27.03.92
16	Davide **FRATTESI**	(22) 22.09.99
20	Abdou **HARROUI** (Mar)	(23) 13.01.98
23	Hamed **TRAORE** (Civ)	(21) 16.02.00
97	Matheus **HENRIQUE** (Bra)	(23)19.12.97

FORWARDS

18	Giacomo **RASPADORI**	(21) 18.02.00
25	Domenico **BERARDI**	(27) 01.08.94
26	Isaac **KARAMOKO** (Fra)	(19) 26.05.02
91	Gianluca **SCAMACCA**	(22) 01.01.99
92	Gregoire **DEFREL** (Mtq)	(30) 17.06.91

COACH

	Alessio **DIONISI**	(41) 01.04.80

SPEZIA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Jeroen **ZOET** (Ned)	(30) 06.01.91
40	Petar **ZOVKO** (Bih)	(19) 25.03.02
94	Ivan **PROVEDEL**	(27) 17.03.94

DEFENDERS

7	Jacopo **SALA**	(29) 05.12.91
13	Arkadiusz **RECA** (Pol)	(26) 17.06.95
14	Jakub **KIWIOR** (Pol)	(21) 15.02.00
15	Petko **HRISTOV** (Bul)	(22) 01.03.99
21	Salva **FERRER** (Spa)	(23) 21.01.98
27	Kelvin **AMIAN** (Fra)	(23) 08.02.98
28	Martin **ERLIC** (Cro)	(23) 24.01.98
43	Dimitrios **NIKOLAOU** (Gre)	(23)13.08.98
77	Nicolo **BERTOLA**	(18) 23.03.03
97	Filippo **SCIEUZO**	(18) 15.07.03

MIDFIELDERS

6	Mehdi **BOURABIA** (Fra)	(30) 07.08.91
8	Viktor **KOVALENKO** (Ukr)	(25) 14.02.96
19	Ebrima **COLLEY** (Gam)	(21) 01.02.00
20	Simone **BASTONI**	(25) 05.11.96
25	Giulio **MAGGIORE**	(23) 12.03.98
31	Aimar **SHER** (Swe)	(18) 20.12.02
33	Kevin **AGUDELO** (Col)	(23) 14.11.98
39	Aurelien **NGUIAMBA** (Fra)	(22) 18.01.99
80	Niccolo **PIETRA**	(18) 28.09.03
88	Leo **SENA** (Bra)	(25) 31.12.95

FORWARDS

9	Rey **MANAJ** (Alb)	(24) 24.02.97
10	Daniele **VERDE**	(25) 20.06.96
11	Emmanuel **GYASI** (Gha)	(27) 11.01.94
17	Suf **PODGOREANU** (Isr)	(19) 20.01.02
18	M'bala **NZOLA** (Ang)	(25) 18.08.96
22	Janis **ANTISTE** (Fra)	(19) 18.08.02
29	Eddie **SALCEDO**	(20) 01.10.01
44	David **STRELEC** (Svk)	(20) 04.04.01
76	Dennis **DELORIE**	(17) 06.11.04
99	Diego **ZUPPEL**	(19) 13.10.02

COACH

	Thiago **MOTTA**	(39) 28.08.82

TORINO

GOALKEEPERS

1	Etrit **BERISHA** (Alb)	(32) 10.03.89
32	Vanja **MILINKOVIC-SAVIC** (Srb)	(24) 20.02.97
89	Luca **GEMELLO**	(21) 03.07.00
90	Razvan **SAVA** (Rou)	(19) 21.06.02

DEFENDERS

3	**BREMER** (Bra)	(24) 18.03.97
5	Armando **IZZO**	(29) 02.03.92
6	David **ZIMA** (Cze)	(21) 08.11.00
13	Ricardo **RODRIGUEZ** (Sui)	(29) 25.08.92
15	Cristian **ANSALDI** (Arg)	(35) 20.09.86
17	Wilfried **SINGO** (Civ)	(20) 25.12.00
26	Koffi **DJIDJI** (Civ)	(28) 30.11.92
27	Mergim **VOJVODA** (Kvx)	(26) 01.02.95
34	Ola **AINA** (Nga)	(25) 08.10.96
99	Alessandro **BUONGIORNO**	(22) 06.06.99

MIDFIELDERS

4	Tommaso **POBEGA**	(22) 15.07.99
8	Daniele **BASELLI**	(29) 12.03.92
10	Sasa **LUKIC** (Srb)	(25) 13.08.96
14	Josip **BREKALO** (Cro)	(23) 23.06.98
22	Dennis **PRAET** (Bel)	(27) 14.05.94
38	Rolando **MANDRAGORA**	(24) 29.06.97
77	Karol **LINETTY** (Pol)	(26) 02.02.95
88	Tomas **RINCON** (Ven)	(33) 13.01.88

FORWARDS

7	Simone **ZAZA**	(30) 25.06.91
9	Andrea **BELOTTI**	(27) 20.12.93
11	Marko **PJACA** (Cro)	(26) 06.05.95
18	Dennis **STOJKOVIC** (Srb)	(19) 03.08.02
19	Antonio **SANABRIA** (Par)	(25) 04.03.96
20	Simone **EDERA**	(24) 09.01.97
24	Simone **VERDI**	(29) 12.07.92
25	Ben **KONE** (Civ)	(21) 14.03.00
70	Magnus **WARMING** (Den)	(21) 08.06.00

COACH

	Ivan **JURIC** (Cro)	(46) 25.08.75

UDINESE

GOALKEEPERS

1	Marco **SILVESTRI**	(30) 02.03.91
20	Daniele **PADELLI**	(36) 25.10.85
29	Antonio **SANTURRO**	(29) 29.02.92
65	Matteo **CARNELOS**	(18) 22.02.03
66	Edoardo **PIANA**	(18) 29.09.03

DEFENDERS

2	Nehuen **PEREZ** (Arg)	(21) 24.06.00
3	**SAMIR** (Bra)	(26) 05.12.94
4	Marvin **ZEEGELAAR** (Ned)	(31) 12.08.90
13	Destiny **UDOGIE**	(18) 28.11.02
16	Nahuel **MOLINA** (Arg)	(23) 02.12.97
17	Bram **NUYTINCK** (Ned)	(31) 04.05.90
19	Jens **STRYGER LARSEN** (Den)	(30) 21.02.91
50	**RODRIGO BECAO** (Bra)	(25) 19.01.96
64	Jan **KUBALA** (Cze)	(21) 05.05.00
87	Sebastien **DE MAIO** (Fra)	(34) 05.03.87
93	Brandon **SOPPY** (Fra)	(19) 21.02.02

MIDFIELDERS

5	Tolgay **ARSLAN** (Ger)	(31) 16.08.90
6	Jean-Victor **MAKENGO** (Fra)	(23) 12.06.98
8	Mato **JAJALO** (Bih)	(33) 24.05.88
11	**WALACE** (Bra)	(26) 04.04.95
24	Lazar **SAMARDZIC** (Ger)	(19) 24.02.02
37	Roberto **PEREYRA** (Arg)	(30) 07.01.91
63	Jacopo **FEDRIZZI**	(18) 18.03.03

FORWARDS

7	Isaac **SUCCESS** (Nga)	(25) 07.01.96
9	**BETO** (Por)	(23) 31.01.98
10	Gerard **DEULOFEU** (Spa)	(27) 13.03.94
23	Ignacio **PUSSETTO** (Arg)	(25) 21.12.95
30	Ilija **NESTOROVSKI** (Mkd)	(31) 12.03.90
32	Fernando **LLORENTE** (Spa)	(36) 26.02.85
45	Fernando **FORESTIERI**	(31) 16.01.90
69	Simone **IANESI**	(19) 13.02.02
91	Lukasz **TEODORCZYK** (Pol)	(30) 03.06.91

COACH

	Luca **GOTTI**	(54) 13.09.67

VENEZIA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Niki **MAENPAA** (Fin)	(36) 23.01.85
12	Luca **LEZZERINI**	(26) 24.03.95
34	Bruno **BERTINATO** (Bra)	(23) 31.05.98
88	Sergio **ROMERO** (Arg)	(34) 22.02.87
91	Filippo **NERI**	(18) 04.12.02

DEFENDERS

3	Cristian **MOLINARO**	(38) 30.07.83
7	Pasquale **MAZZOCCHI**	(26) 27.07.95
13	Marco **MODOLO**	(32) 23.03.89
22	Tyronne **EBUEHI** (Nga)	(25) 16.12.95
28	David **SCHNEGG** (Aut)	(23) 29.09.98
30	Michael **SVOBODA** (Aut)	(23) 15.10.98
31	Mattia **CALDARA**	(27) 05.05.94
32	Pietro **CECCARONI**	(25) 21.12.95
44	Ethan **AMPADU** (Wal)	(21) 14.09.00
55	Ridgeciano **HAPS** (Sur)	(28) 12.06.93

MIDFIELDERS

5	Antonio **VACCA**	(31) 13.05.90
6	Jacopo **DEZI**	(29) 10.02.92
8	Tanner **TESSMANN** (USA)	(20) 24.09.01
11	Arnor **SIGURDSSON** (Isl)	(22) 15.05.99
16	Luca **FIORDILINO**	(25) 25.07.96
18	Daan **HEYMANS** (Bel)	(22) 15.06.99
21	Lauri **ALA-MYLLYMAKI** (Fin)	(24) 04.06.97
23	Sofian **KIYINE** (Mar)	(24) 02.10.97
27	Gianluca **BUSIO** (USA)	(19) 28.05.02
33	Domen **CRNIGOJ** (Svn)	(26) 18.11.95
42	Dor **PERETZ** (Isr)	(26) 17.05.95

FORWARDS

9	Francesco **FORTE**	(28) 01.05.93
10	Mattia **ARAMU**	(26) 14.05.95
14	Thomas **HENRY** (Fra)	(27) 20.09.94
17	Dennis **JOHNSEN** (Nor)	(23) 17.02.98
19	Bjarki **STEINN BJARKASON** (Isl)	(21) 11.05.00
24	Riccardo **BOCALON**	(32) 03.03.89
39	Gianmarco **ZIGONI**	(30) 10.05.91
77	David **OKEREKE** (Nga)	(24) 29.08.97

COACH

	Paolo **ZANETTI**	(38) 16.12.82

VERONA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Ivor **PANDUR** (Cro)	(21) 25.03.00
22	Alessandro **BERARDI**	(30) 16.01.91
96	Lorenzo **MONTIPO**	(25) 20.02.96

DEFENDERS

5	Davide **FARAONI**	(30) 25.10.91
15	Mert **CETIN** (Tur)	(24) 01.01.97
16	Nicolo **CASALE**	(23) 14.02.98
17	Federico **CECCHERINI**	(29) 11.05.92
20	Kevin **RUEGG** (Sui)	(23) 05.08.98
21	Koray **GUNTER** (Ger)	(27) 16.08.94
23	Giangiacomo **MAGNANI**	(26) 04.10.95
27	Pawel **DAWIDOWICZ** (Pol)	(26) 20.05.95
30	Gianluca **FRABOTTA**	(22) 24.06.99
31	Bosko **SUTALO** (Cro)	(21) 01.01.00

MIDFIELDERS

4	Miguel **VELOSO** (Por)	(35) 11.05.86
7	Antonin **BARAK** (Cze)	(26) 03.12.94
8	Darko **LAZOVIC** (Srb)	(31) 15.09.90
14	Ivan **ILIC** (Srb)	(20) 17.03.01
24	Daniel **BESSA**	(28) 14.01.93
61	Adrien **TAMEZE** (Fra)	(27) 04.02.94
78	Martin **HONGLA** (Cmr)	(23) 16.03.98

FORWARDS

9	Nikola **KALINIC** (Cro)	(33) 05.01.88
10	Gianluca **CAPRARI**	(28) 30.07.93
11	Kevin **LASAGNA**	(29) 10.08.92
18	Matteo **CANCELLIERI**	(19) 12.02.02
32	Antonino **RAGUSA**	(31) 27.03.90
45	Philip **YEBOAH** (Gha)	(19) 27.09.02
99	Giovanni **SIMEONE** (Arg)	(26) 05.07.95

COACH

	Igor **TUDOR** (Cro)	(43) 16.04.78

(Ages as of 26.11.21)

Club Football

EUROPE

2021-22 UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group Stage

Group A

Oct 19 – Brugge
Club Brugge 1 (Vanaken 81)
Manchester City 5 (Cancelo 30, Mahrez 43 pen, 84, Walker 53, Palmer 67)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Kovacs (Rou)

Oct 19 – Paris
Paris Saint-Germain 3 (Mbappe 9, Messi 67, 74 pen)
RB Leipzig 2 (A. Silva 28, Mukiele 57)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Guida (Ita)

Nov 3 – Leipzig
RB Leipzig 2 (Nkunku 8, Szoboszlai 90+2 pen)
Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Wijnaldum 21, 39)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Ekberg (Swe)

Nov 3 – Manchester
Manchester City 4 (Foden 15, Mahrez 54, Sterling 72, Jesus 90+2)
Club Brugge 1 (Stones 17 og)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Mateu Lahoz (Spa)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Manchester City	4	3	0	1	15	7	9
PSG	4	2	2	0	8	5	8
Club Brugge	4	1	1	2	5	11	4
RB Leipzig	4	0	1	3	8	13	1

Group B

Oct 19 – Madrid
Atletico Madrid 2 (Griezmann 20, 34)
Liverpool 3 (Salah 8, 78 pen, Keita 13)
HT: 2-2. **Ref:** Siebert (Ger)

Oct 19 – Porto
Porto 1 (Diaz 65)
Milan 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)

Nov 3 – Milan
Milan 1 (Mbemba 61 og)
Porto 1 (Diaz 6)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Turpin (Fra)

Nov 3 – Liverpool
Liverpool 2 (Jota 13, Mane 21)
Atletico Madrid 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Makkelie (Ned)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	4	4	0	0	13	5	12
Porto	4	1	2	1	3	6	5
Atletico Madrid	4	1	1	2	4	6	4
Milan	4	0	1	3	4	7	1

Group C

Oct 19 – Istanbul
Besiktas 1 (Larin 24)
Sporting 4 (Coates 15, 27, Sarabia 44 pen, Paulinho 89)
HT: 1-3. **Ref:** Vincic (Svn)

Oct 19 – Amsterdam
Ajax 4 (Reus 11 og, Blind 25, Antony 57, Haller 72)
Borussia Dortmund 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Manzano (Spa)

Nov 3 – Dortmund
Borussia Dortmund 1 (Reus 37 pen)
Ajax 3 (Tadic 72, Haller 83, Klaassen 90+3)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Oliver (Eng)

Nov 3 – Lisbon
Sporting 4 (Pote 31 pen, 38, Paulinho 41, Sarabia 56)
Besiktas 0
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Karasev (Rus)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ajax	4	4	0	0	14	2	12
Sporting	4	2	0	2	4	8	6
B. Dortmund	4	2	0	2	9	7	6
Besiktas	4	0	0	4	2	12	0

Group D

Oct 19 – Kiev
Shakhtar Donetsk 0
Real Madrid 5 (Kryvtsov 37 og, Vinicius 51, 56, Rodrygo 65, Benzema 90+1)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Jovanovic (Srb)

Oct 19 – Milan
Internazionale 3 (Dzeko 34, Vidal 58, De Vrij 67)
Sheriff Tiraspol 1 (Thill 52)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Makkelie (Ned)

Nov 3 – Madrid
Real Madrid 2 (Benzema 14, 61)
Shakhtar Donetsk 1 (Fernando 39)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Bastien (Fra)

Nov 3 – Tiraspol
Sheriff Tiraspol 1 (Traore 90+2)
Inter 3 (Brozovic 54, Skriniar 64, Sanchez 82)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Zwayer (Ger)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Madrid	4	3	0	1	9	3	9
Internazionale	4	2	1	1	6	3	7
Sheriff Tiraspol	4	2	0	2	6	7	6
Shakhtar	4	0	1	3	1	9	1

Group E

Oct 20 – Barcelona
Barcelona 1 (Pique 36)
Dynamo Kiev 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Turpin (Fra)

Oct 20 – Lisbon
Benfica 0
Bayern Munich 4 (Sane 70, 84, Everton 80 og, Lewandowski 82)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Hategan (Rou)

Nov 2 – Munich
Bayern Munich 5 (Lewandowski 26, 61, 84, Gnabry 32, Sane 49)
Benfica 2 (Morato 38, Nunez 74)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Marciniak (Pol)

Nov 2 – Kiev
Dynamo Kiev 0
Barcelona 1 (Fati 70)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Hategan (Rou)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bayern Munich	4	4	0	0	17	2	12
Barcelona	4	2	0	2	2	6	6
Benfica	4	1	1	2	5	9	4
Dynamo Kiev	4	0	1	3	0	7	1

Group F

Oct 20 – Manchester
Man. Utd 3 (Rashford 53, Maguire 75, Ronaldo 81)
Atalanta 2 (Pasalic 15, Demiral 29)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Marciniak (Pol)

Oct 20 – Berne
Young Boys 1 (Elia 77)
Villarreal 4 (Yeremy 6, G. Moreno 16, A. Moreno 88, Chukwueze 90+2)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Karasev (Rus)

Nov 2 – Bergamo
Atalanta 2 (Ilicic 12, Zapata 56)
Manchester United 2 (Ronaldo 45+1, 90+1)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Vincic (Svn)

Nov 2 – Villarreal
Villarreal 2 (Capoue 36, Danjuma 89)
Young Boys 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Gozubuyuk (Ned)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Manchester Utd	4	2	1	1	8	7	7
Villarreal	4	2	1	1	9	5	7
Atalanta	4	1	2	1	7	7	5
Young Boys	4	1	0	3	3	8	3

Group G

Oct 20 – Lille
Lille 0
Sevilla 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Oliver (Eng)

Oct 20 – Salzburg
RB Salzburg 3 (Adeyemi 3, Okafor 65, 77)
Wolfsburg 1 (Nmecha 15)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Orsato (Ita)

Nov 2 – Seville
Sevilla 1 (Ocampos 15)
Lille 2 (David 43 pen, Ikone 51)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Kovacs (Rou)

Nov 2 – Wolfsburg
Wolfsburg 2 (Baku 3, L. Nmecha 60)
Red Bull Salzburg 1 (Wober 30)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Dias (Por)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
RB Salzburg	4	2	1	1	7	5	7
Lille	4	1	2	1	3	3	5
Wolfsburg	4	1	2	1	4	5	5
Sevilla	4	0	3	1	3	4	3

Group H

Oct 20 – Saint-Petersburg
Zenit 0
Juventus 1 (Kulusevski 86)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Scharer (Sui)

Oct 20 – London
Chelsea 4 (Christensen 9, Jorginho 21 pen, 57 pen, Havertz 48)
Malmo 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Letexier (Fra)

Nov 2 – Malmo
Malmo 0
Chelsea 1 (Ziyech 56)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)

Nov 2 – Turin
Juventus 4 (Dybala 11, 58 pen, Chiesa 73, Morata 82)
Zenit 2 (Bonucci 26 og, Azmoun 90+2)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Hernandez (Spa)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Juventus	4	4	0	0	9	2	12
Chelsea	4	3	0	1	6	1	9
Zenit	4	1	0	3	6	6	3
Malmo	4	0	0	4	0	12	0

2021-22 UEFA EUROPA LEAGUE

Group Stage

Group A

Oct 21 – Prague
Sparta Prague 3 (Haraslin 4, 19, Krejci 90+6)
Lyon 4 (Toko Ekambi 42, 88, Aouar 53, Paqueta 67)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Jug (Svn)

Oct 21 – Glasgow
Rangers 2 (Balogun 18, Roofe 30)
Brondby 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Jovic (Cro)

Nov 4 – Lyon
Lyon 3 (Slimani 61, 63, Toko Ekambi 90+2)
Sparta Prague 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Mariani (Ita)

Nov 4 – Brondby
Brondby 1 (Balogun 45 og)
Rangers 1 (Hagi 77)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Dabanovic (Mne)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lyon	4	4	0	0	12	3	12
Sparta Prague	4	1	1	2	4	7	4
Rangers	4	1	1	2	3	4	4
Brondby	4	0	2	2	1	6	2

Group B

Oct 21 – Graz
Sturm Graz 0
Real Sociedad 1 (Isak 69)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Stieler (Ger)

Oct 21 – Eindhoven
PSV 1 (Gakpo 59)
Monaco 2 (Boadu 20, Diop 89)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Massa (Ita)

Nov 4 – Monaco
Monaco 0
PSV 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Cakir (Tur)

Nov 4 – San Sebastian
Real Sociedad 1 (Sorloth 53)
Sturm Graz 1 (Jantscher 38)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Treimanis (Ltv)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Monaco	4	2	2	0	4	2	8
Real Sociedad	4	1	3	0	4	3	6
PSV	4	1	2	1	7	5	5
Sturm Graz	4	0	1	3	1	6	1

Group C

Oct 20 – Moscow
Spartak Moscow 3 (Sobolev 11, 86, Larsson 44)
Leicester City 4 (Daka 45, 48, 54, 78)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Sidiropoulos (Gre)

Oct 21 – Naples
Napoli 3 (Insigne 76, Osimhen 80, Politano 90+5)
Legia Warsaw 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Del Cerro Grande (Spa)

Nov 4 – Warsaw
Legia Warsaw 1 (Emreli 10)
Napoli 4 (Zielinski 51 pen, Mertens 75 pen, Lozano 79, Ounas 90)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Visser (Bel)

Nov 4 – Leicester
Leicester City 1 (Amartey 58)
Spartak Moscow 1 (Moses 51)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Meler (Tur)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Napoli	4	2	1	1	11	6	7
Legia Warsaw	4	2	0	2	3	7	6
Leicester City	4	1	2	1	7	7	5
Spartak Moscow	4	1	1	2	7	8	4

Group D

Oct 21 – Istanbul
Fenerbahce 2 (Valencia 21, 45)
Antwerp 2 (Samatta 2, Gerkens 62)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Ivanov (Rus)

Oct 21 – Frankfurt
Eintracht Frankfurt 3 (Santos Borre 26 pen, Toure 45+3, Kamada 59)
Olympiakos 1 (El-Arabi 30 pen)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Martins (Por)

Nov 4 – Piraeus
Olympiakos 1 (El-Arabi 12)
Eintracht Frankfurt 2 (Kamada 17, Hauge 90+2)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Kulbakov (Blr)

Nov 4 – Antwerp
Antwerp 0
Fenerbahce 3 (Yandas 8, Meyer 16, Berisha 29)
HT: 0-3. **Ref:** Peljto (Bih)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
E. Frankfurt	2	3	1	0	7	3	10
Olympiakos	2	2	0	2	7	6	6
Fenerbahce	2	1	2	1	6	6	5
Antwerp	2	0	1	3	3	8	1

Group E

Oct 21 – Rome
Lazio 0
Marseille 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Aytekin (Ger)

Oct 21 – Moscow
Lokomotiv Moscow 0
Galatasaray 1 (Akturkoglu 82)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Lechner (Aut)

Nov 4 – Istanbul
Galatasaray 1 (Feghouli 43)
Lokomotiv Moscow 1 (Kamano 73)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Scharer (Sui)

Nov 4 – Marseille
Marseille 2 (Milik 33 pen, Payet 82)
Lazio 2 (F. Anderson 45+7, Immobile 49)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Sanchez Martinez (Spa)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Galatasaray	4	2	2	0	1	0	4
Lazio	4	1	2	1	2	1	3
Marseille	4	0	4	1	1	3	1
Lokomotiv	4	0	2	0	1	1	2

Group F

Oct 21 – Razgrad
Ludogorets 0
Braga 1 (R. Horta 7)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Tohver (Est)

Oct 21 – Herning
Midtjylland 1 (Dyhr 78)
Red Star Belgrade 1 (Ivanic 58)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Reinshreiber (Isr)

Nov 4 – Braga
Braga 4 (Musrati 25, Medeiros 37, Galeno 40, Gonzalez 73)
Ludogorets 2 (Sotiriou 33, Plastun 79)
HT: 3-1. **Ref:** Nyberg (Swe)

Nov 4 – Belgrade
Red Star Belgrade 0
Midtjylland 1 (Kanga 56 og)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Bognar (Hun)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Braga	4	3	0	1	9	5	9
Red Star	4	2	1	1	4	3	7
Midtjylland	4	1	2	1	4	5	5
Ludogorets	4	0	1	3	3	7	1

Group G

Oct 19 – Glasgow
Celtic 2 (Furuhashi 57, Vecsei 81 og)
Ferencvaros 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Kehlet (Den)

Oct 21 – Seville
Real Betis 1 (Iglesias 75 pen)
Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Andrich 82)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Frankowski (Pol)

Nov 4 – Leverkusen
B. Leverkusen 4 (Diaby 42, 52, Wirtz 86, Amiri 90)
Real Betis 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Taylor (Eng)

Nov 4 – Budapest
Ferencvaros 2 (Juranovic 11 og, Uzuni 86)
Celtic 3 (Furuhashi 3, Jota 23, Abada 60)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Verissimo (Por)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
B. Leverkusen	4	3	1	0	11	2	10
Real Betis	4	2	1	1	8	9	7
Celtic	4	2	0	2	8	10	6
Ferencvaros	4	0	0	4	4	10	0

Group H

Oct 21 – Vienna
Rapid Vienna 2 (Grull 9, Hofmann 34)
Dinamo Zagreb 1 (Orsic 24)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Monzul (Ukr)

Oct 21 – London
West Ham 3 (Dawson 45+1, Diop 57, Bowen 59)
Genk 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Rumsas (Ltu)

Nov 4 – Genk
Genk 2 (Paintsil 5, Soucek 88 og)
West Ham United 2 (Benrahma 59, 82)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Stavrev (Mke)

Nov 4 – Zagreb
D. Zagreb 3 (Petkovic 12, Andric 34, Sutalo 83)
Rapid Vienna 1 (Knasmullner 8)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Beaton (Sco)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
West Ham	4	3	1	0	9	2	10
Dinamo Zagreb	4	2	0	2	7	5	6
Rapid Vienna	4	1	1	2	3	8	4
Genk	4	1	0	3	3	7	3

2021-22 UEFA EUROPA CONFERENCE LEAGUE

Group Stage

Group A

Oct 21 – Yerevan
Alashkert 0
LASK 3 (Hong 35, Goignger 68, Michorl 90+2)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Maae (Den)

Oct 21 – Helsinki
HJK 0
Maccabi Tel Aviv 5 (Kanichowsky 28, 60, Perica 49 pen, Saborit 87 pen, Shamir 90+4)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Orel (Cze)

Nov 4 – Klagenfurt
LASK 2 (Nakamura 12, 87)
Alashkert 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Al-Hakim (Swe)

Nov 4 – Tel Aviv
Maccabi Tel Aviv 3 (Kuwas 22, Lingman 65 og, Hozez 90+3)
HJK 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Obrenovic (Svn)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Maccabi Tel Aviv	4	3	1	0	13	2	10
LASK	4	3	1	0	8	1	10
HJK	4	1	0	3	4	12	3
Alashkert	4	0	0	4	3	13	0

Group B

Oct 21 – Larnaca
Anorthosis Famagusta 2 (Deletic 25, Popovic 28)
Flora 2 (Saapinen 38, 80)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Vad (Hun)

Oct 21 – Belgrade
Partizan Belgrade 0
Gent 1 (Kums 59)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Madden (Sco)

Nov 4 – Tallinn
Flora 2 (Sappinen 55, Zenjov 58)
Anorthosis Famagusta 2 (Christofi 29, Popovic 33)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Hovdanum (Fro)

Nov 4 – Gent
Gent 1 (Tissoudali 80)
Partizan Belgrade 1 (Urosevic 66)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Kavanagh (Eng)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gent	4	3	1	0	5	1	10
Partizan	4	2	1	1	5	2	7
Flora	4	0	2	2	4	7	2
Anorthosis	4	0	2	2	4	8	2

Group C

Oct 21 – Bodo
Bodo/Glimt 6 (Botheim 8, 52, Berg 20, Solbakken 71, 80, Pellegrino 78)
Roma 1 (Perez 28)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Palabiyik (Tur)

Oct 21 – Sofia
CSKA Sofia 0
Zorya Luhansk 1 (Sayyadmanesh 65)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Schuttengruber (Aut)

Nov 4 – Zaporizhzhia
Zorya Luhansk 2 (Zahedi 87, Sayyadmanesh 90+5)
CSKA Sofia 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Viljanen (Fin)

Nov 4 – Rome
Roma 2 (El Shaarawy 54, Ibanez 84)
Bodo/Glimt 2 (Solbakken 45+1, Botheim 65)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Papapetrou (Gre)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bodo/Glimt	4	2	2	0	11	4	8
Roma	4	2	1	1	11	9	7
Zorya Luhansk	4	2	0	2	4	6	6
CSKA Sofia	4	0	1	3	1	8	1

Group D

Oct 21 – Jablonec
Jablonec 2 (Cvancara 35, 53)
Randers 2 (Odey 36, 90 pen)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Aghayev (Aze)

Oct 21 – Cluj
CFR Cluj 0
AZ 1 (Karlsson 18)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Ozkahya (Tur)

Nov 4 – Alkmaar
AZ 2 (Gudmundsson 5, Pavlidis 86)
CFR Cluj 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Durieux (Lux)

Nov 4 – Randers
Randers 2 (Hammershoy-Mistrati 46, Kubista 53 og)
Jablonec 2 (Cvancara 73, Kratochvil 83)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Grinfeld (Isr)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AZ	4	3	1	0	6	2	4
Jablonec	4	1	2	1	5	5	3
Randers	4	0	4	0	7	7	2
CFR Cluj	4	0	1	3	1	5	1

Group E

Oct 21 – Haifa
Maccabi Haifa 1 (Donyoh 24)
Slavia Prague 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Farkas (Hun)

Oct 21 – Rotterdam
Feyenoord 3 (Jahanbakhsh 11, Linssen 29, Sinisterra 76)
Union Berlin 1 (Awoniyi 35)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Kruashvili (Geo)

Nov 4 – Prague
Slavia Prague 1 (Kuchta 49)
Maccabi Haifa 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Steen (Nor)

Nov 4 – Berlin
Union Berlin 1 (Trimmel 41)
Feyenoord 2 (Sinisterra 15, Dessers 72)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Stefanski (Pol)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Feyenoord	4	3	1	0	7	3	10
Slavia Prague	4	2	0	2	5	4	6
Maccabi Haifa	4	1	1	2	1	4	4
Union Berlin	4	1	0	3	6	8	3

Group F

Oct 21 – Copenhagen
Copenhagen 1 (Bilel 80)
PAOK 2 (Sidcley 19, Zivkovic 38)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Lambrechts (Bel)

Oct 21 –Bratislava
Slovan Bratislava 2 (Green 46, Henty 84)
Lincoln Red Imps 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Thorarinsson (Isl)

Nov 4 – Gibraltar
Lincoln Red Imps 1 (R. Chipolina 45+3)
Slovan Bratislava 4 (Green 17, 25, Cavric 67, Mraz 71)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Karlsson (Swe)

Nov 4 – Thessaloniki
PAOK 1 (A. Zivkovic 8)
Copenhagen 2 (Ankersen 34, Biel 50)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Raczkowski (Pol)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Copenhagen	4	3	0	1	9	5	9
Slovan Bratislava	4	2	1	1	8	5	7
PAOK	4	2	1	1	6	4	7
Lincoln Red Imps	4	0	0	4	2	11	0

Group G

Oct 21 – Maribor
Mura 1 (Lotric 20)
Rennes 2 (Guirassy 17 pen, Laborde 41)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Chinkov (Bul)

Oct 21 – Arnhem
Vitesse 1 (Wittek 78)
Tottenham Hotspur 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Osmers (Ger)

Nov 4 – Rennes
Rennes 1 (Bade 76)
Mura 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Frisher (Est)

Nov 4 – London
Tottenham Hotspur 3 (Son Heung-Min 15, Lucas 22, Rasmussen 28 og)
Vitesse 2 (Rasmussen 32, Bero 39)
HT: 3-2. **Ref:** Di Bello (Ita)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rennes	4	3	1	0	7	4	10
Tottenham	4	2	1	1	10	6	7
Vitesse	4	2	0	2	6	5	6
Mura	4	0	0	4	2	10	0

Group H

Oct 21 – Baku
Qarabag 2 (Sheydayev 79, A. Huseynov 90+1)
Kairat 1 (Kante 19 pen)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Aranovskyi (Ukr)

Oct 21 –Basel
Basel 3 (Millar 19, Cabral 41 pen, Zhegrova 88)
Omonia Nicosia 1 (Gomez 27 pen)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Frappart (Fra)

Nov 4 –Almaty
Kairat 1 (Kante 68)
Qarabag 2 (Wadji 58, Zoubir 72)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Muntean (Mol)

Nov 4 – Nicosia
Omonia Nicosia 1 (Kakoullis 17)
Basel 1 (Millar 57)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Meshkov (Rus)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Qarabag	4	3	1	0	8	3	10
Basel	4	2	2	0	8	4	8
Omonia	4	0	2	2	3	8	2
Kairat	4	0	1	3	4	8	1

AFRICA

2021-22 CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

First Round Qualifiers – 1st leg

Sep 10 – Durban
AmaZulu 0
Nyasa Big Bullets 1 (Msowoya 26)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Mokete (Les)

Sep 10 – Entebbe
Express 2 (Kambale 7, Kizza 60)
Al Merrikh 1 (Al Madina 39)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Djama (Dji)

Sep 11 – Djibouti City
Arta/Solar7 1 (Traore 16)
Tusker 1 (Ibrahimu 14)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Bazezew (Eth)

Sep 11 – Libreville
AS Bouenguidi 1 (Mpia 17 og)
Maniema Union 1 (Nguele 5 og)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Da Costa (Stp)

Sep 11 – Yaounde
AS SONABEL 0
Stade Malien 1 (Traore 22)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Aklassou (Tog)

Sep 11 – Cotonou
ESAE 1 (Kpara 67)
FC Nouadhibou 1 (M'Changama 17)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Basheer (Nga)

Sep 11 – Bakau
Fortune FC 3 (Camara 22, Sylva 59, Barry 81)
ES Setif 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Forkpah (Lib)

Sep 11 – Gaborone
Jwaneng Galaxy 2 (Mokoena 64, Rudath 87)
DFC 8eme 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Nkole (Zam)

Sep 11 – Djibouti City
Mogadishu City 0
APR 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Kayoko (Tan)

Sep 11 – Manzini
Royal Leopards 1 (Sakala 60 og)
ZESCO United 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Chimene (Zim)

Sep 11 – Luanda
Sagrada Esperanca 0
FC Platinum 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Sibandze (Esw)

Sep 11 – Thies
Teungueth 0
ASEC Mimosas 1 (Diakite 50)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Sarr (Mtn)

Sep 11 – Maputo
UD Songo 1 (Lau King 81)
AS Otoho 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Dungula (Ang)

Sep 11 – Niamey
USGN 1 (Hinsa 17)
Le Messager Ngozi 1 (Hakizimana 82)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Bado (Bfa)

Sep 12 – Ebibeyin
Akonangui 0
Zanaco 2 (Katema 14, Mbewe 31)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Mbelle (Cam)

Sep 12 – Uyo
Akwa United 1 (Friday 87)
Belouizdad 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Kpan (Civ)

Sep 12 – Bahir Dar
Fasil Kenema 2 (Desta 68, Afolabi 78)
Al Hilal Omdurman 2 (Abdelrahman 23 pen, Yaser 53)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Oloya (Uga)

Sep 12 – Yaounde
Fovu de Baham 2 (Nsangue 10, Ikpeme 89)
Petro de Luanda 2 (Azulao 19, Teixeira 45)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Malala (Cod)

Sep 12 – Monrovia
LPRC Oilers 3 (Sackor 25, Gbotoe 70, Richardson 71)
ASKO Kara 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Rodrigues (Cpv)

Sep 12 – Monrovia
KMKM 0
Al Ittihad 2 (Eisa 45, Al Shadi 85)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Twagiramukiza (Rwa)

Sep 12 – Dar es Salaam
Young Africans 0
Rivers United 1 (Omoduemuke 51)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Hagi (Som)

Sep 19 – Accra
Hearts of Oak 2 (Kordzi 84, Adams 90+4)
Kamsar 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Vlei (Civ)
Played over one leg due to the Guinean coup d'état

First Round Qualifiers – 2nd leg

Sep 17 – Douala
DFC 8eme 1 (1) (Mokonou 86)
Jwaneng Galaxy 0 (2)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Tangi (Cod)

Sep 17 – Mbagala
Le Messager Ngozi 0 (1)
USGN 1 (2) (Diori 47)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Guedi (Dji)

Sep 17 – Bamako
Stade Malien 3 (4) (Traore 10 pen, 26, Diakite 40)
AS SONABEL 0 (0)
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Sandigui (Sen)

Sep 18 – Nouakchott
FC Nouadhibou 2 (3) (Tanjy 55 pen, Moushine 75)
ESAE 0 (1)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Amadou Sy (Sen)

Sep 18 – Harare
FC Platinum 0 (0)
Sagrada Esperanca 0 (0)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Tom (Saf)
Sagrada Esperanca win 5-4 on penalties

Sep 18 – Lilongwe
Nyasa Big Bullets 1 (2) (Kabichi 48)
AmaZulu 3 (3) (Ntuli 4 pen, 11, Mthembu 54)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Alvacao (Moz)

Sep 18 – Luanda
Petro de Luanda 0 (2)
Fovu de Baham 0 (2)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Unknown
Petro de Luanda win on away goals

Sep 18 – Nairobi
Tusker 3 (4) (Kibwana 8 pen, Ibrahimu 24, Ojok 75)
Arta/Solar7 0 (1)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Eltreefe (Sud)

Sep 18 – Ndola
ZESCO United 2 (2) (Rusike 30, Kalengo 47)
Royal Leopards 1 (2) (Magagula 35)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Goma (Ang)
Royal Leopards win on away goals

Sep 19 – Omdurman
Al Hilal Omdurman 1 (3) (Abdelrahman 25)
Fasil Kenema 1 (3) (Dagnachew 81)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Nkurunziza (Bur)
Al Hilal win on away goals

Sep 19 – Sfax
Al Ittihad 2 (4) (Kara 53, Zubya 72 pen)
KMKM 0 (0)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** El-Ghandour (Egy)

Sep 19 – El-Obeid
Al Merrikh 1 (2) (Mahmoud 73)
Express 0 (2)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Hakizimana (Rwa)
Al Merrikh win on away goals

Sep 19 – Kigali
APR 2 (2) (Manishimwe 59, Hassan 73)
Mogadishu City 1 (1) (Boue Bi 24)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Tadesse (Eth)

Sep 19 – Brazzaville
AS Otoho 1 (1) (Nkounkou 73 pen)
UD Songo 0 (1)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Nchama (Eqg)
AS Otoha win 4-3 on penalties

Sep 19 – Abidjan
ASEC Mimosas 1 (2) (Konate 74)
Teungueth 0 (0)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Kabore (Bfa)

Sep 19 – Lome
ASKO Kara 2 (2) (Dweh 21 og, Magnim 53)
LPRC Oilers 1 (4) (Sackor 90+5)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Alou (Nig)

Sep 19 – Algiers
Belouizdad 2 (2) (Khalfallah 70, Nessakh 83 pen)
Akwa United 0 (1)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Abdulbasit (Lib)

Sep 19 – Setif
ES Setif 3 (3) (Sawaneh 3 og, Benayad 20, Djabou 66)
Fortune FC 0 (3)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Kechaf (Mar)
ES Setif win 5-4 on penalties

Sep 19 – Kindu
Maniema Union 2 (3) (Wango 12, Kalowa 40)
AS Bouenguidi 0 (1)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Lemouchele (Cam)

Sep 19 – Port Harcourt
Rivers United 1 (2) (Onwuansanya 81)
Young Africans 0 (0)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Abul-Latif (Gha)

Sep 19 – Lusaka
Zanaco 1 (3) (Siankombo 68)
Akonangui 0 (0)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Mositwane (Bot)

Second Round Qualifiers – 1st leg

Oct 15 – Durban
AmaZulu 0
TP Mazembe 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ndabihawenimana (Bur)

Oct 16 – Cairo
Al Merrikh 3 (Edjomariegwe 48, Agab 76, Awad 80)
Zanaco 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Huraywida (Lib)

Oct 16 – Kigali
APR 1 (Manishimwe 40)
Etoile du Sahel 1 (Meziani 3)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Bondo (Bot)

Oct 16 – Abidjan
ASEC Mimosas 3 (Konate 12, 50, Pokou 63)
Belouizdad 1 (Bouchar 4)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Djama (Dji)

Oct 16 – Luanda
Sagrada Esperanca 3 (Caranga 16, Celso 86, 90)
Royal Leopards 1 (Diamini 77)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Alvacao (Moz)

Oct 16 – Bamako
Stade Malien 0
Horoya 1 (Agyei 55)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Zourak (Mar)

Oct 16 – Nairobi
Tusker 0
Zamalek 1 (Bencharki 47)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Weyesa (Eth)

Oct 16 – Niamey
USGN 1 (Diori 75)
Al Ahly 1 (Maaloul 19 pen)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Laryea (Gha)

Oct 17 – Benghazi
Al Ittihad 0
Esperance 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Essouma (Cam)

Oct 17 – Brazzaville
AS Otoho 2 (Nkaya 61, Okouri 75)
Petro de Luanda 2 (Gleison 83, Vidinho 88)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Camille (Sey)

Oct 17 – Nouakchott
FC Nouadhibou 3 (Tanjy 54, 75, Bessam 57)
ES Setif 1 (Deghmoum 41)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Sy (Sen)

Oct 17 – Accra
Hearts of Oak 1 (Mensah 41)
Wydad 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Carvalho (Ang)

Oct 17 – Gaborone
Jwaneng Galaxy 0
Simba 2 (Lwanga 3, Bocco 6)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Ngambo (Cod)

Oct 17 – Marrakesh
LPRC Oilers 0
Raja 2 (Rahimi 21, Benhaib 35)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Gueye (Sen)

Oct 17 – Kinshasa
Maniema Union 2 (Kalowa 35, Mutuila 89)
Mamelodi Sundowns 2 (Zwane 7, 84)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Sikazwe (Zim)

Oct 17 – Port Harcourt
Rivers United 1 (Ering 69 og)
Al Hilal Omdurman 1 (Yaser 35)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Unknown

Second Round Qualifiers – 2nd leg

Oct 22 – Alexandria
Zamalek 4 (5) (Obama 12, 74, Jaziri 19, Bencharki 72)
Tusker 0 (0)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Dahane (Mtn)

Oct 23 – Cairo
Al Ahly 6 (7) (Sherif 9, Magdy 26, 58, El Shahat 64, Kahraba 69, Fathy 89)
USGN 1 (2) (Hinsa 35)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Heeralall (Mri)

Oct 23 – Monastir
Etoile du Sahel 4 (5) (Chikhaoui 19 pen, 47, Dhaoui 90+3, Soumah 90+4)
APR 0 (1)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Gassama (Gam)

Oct 23 – Luanda
Petro de Luanda 2 (4) (Vidinho 44, Pessoa 73)
AS Otoho 0 (2)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ishimwe (Rwa)

Oct 23 – Casablanca
Raja 2 (4) (Benhalib 6, Soukhane 26)
LPRC Oilers 0 (0)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Waweru (Ken)

Oct 23 – Manzini
Royal Leopards 1 (2) (Magagula 88)
Sagrada Esperanca 0 (3)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Nkounkou (Con)

Oct 23 – Lubumbashi
TP Mazembe 1 (1) (Bossu 90+5)
AmaZulu 1 (1) (Ntuli 38)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Ismail (Sud)
AmaZulu win on away goals

Oct 23 – Lusaka
Zanaco 2 (2) (Manda 23, Siankombo 86)
Al Merrikh 1 (4) (Edjomariegwe 13)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Traore (Civ)

Oct 24 – Suez
Al Hilal Omdurman 1 (2) (Muzmel 4)
Rivers United 0 (1)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Boukhalfa (Alg)

Oct 24 – Algiers
Belouizdad 2 (3) (Keddad 2, Bousselou 48)
ASEC Mimosas 0 (3)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Sariri (Tun)
Belouizdad win on away goals

Oct 24 – Setif
ES Setif 2 (3) (Deghmoum 44, Darfalou 84)
FC Nouadhibou 0 (3)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Traore (Mli)
ES Setif win on away goals

Oct 24 – Tunis
Esperance 1 (1) (Ben Khalifa 63)
Al Ittihad Tripoli 0 (0)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ghandour (Egy)

Oct 24 – Conakry
Horoya 2 (3) (Nikiema 36, Coulibaly 52)
Stade Malien 1 (1) (Konate 72)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Selmi (Tun)

Oct 24 – Pretoria
Mamelodi Sundowns 2 (4) (Lakay 22, Shalulile 53)
Maniema Union 0 (2)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Omar (Egy)

Oct 24 – Dar es Salaam
Simba 1 (3) (Bwalya 41)
Jwaneng Galaxy 3 (3) (Rudath 50, 60, Mohutsiwa 86)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Tom (Saf)
Jwaneng Galaxy win on away goals

Oct 24 – Casablanca
Wydad 6 (6) (Msuva 4, 61, El Hassouni 8, Dari 20, Jabrane 38 pen, Serrhat 49)
Hearts of Oak 1 (2) (Razak 84)
HT: 4-0. **Ref:** Otogo-Castane (Gab)

MALAWI

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nyasa Big Bullets (C)	30	18	8	4	51	18	62
Silver Strikers	30	18	4	8	55	20	58
Be Forward Wanderers	30	15	10	5	38	20	55
CIVO United	30	12	12	6	37	26	48
Karonga United	30	12	10	8	34	26	46
Moyale Barracks	30	12	10	8	30	32	46
TN Stars	30	12	7	11	28	41	43
MAFCO	30	10	12	8	31	29	42
Ekwendeni Hammers	30	11	8	11	32	31	41
Kamuzu Barracks	30	10	11	9	29	31	41
Red Lions	30	9	8	13	27	31	35
Blue Eagles	30	7	11	12	29	29	32
Mighty Tigers	30	8	8	14	24	32	32
Chitipa United (R)	30	9	5	16	23	41	32
Ntopwa (R)	30	5	6	19	28	55	21
Mzuni (R)	30	4	6	20	18	52	18

SUDAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Hilal Omdurman (C)	30	25	4	1	75	10	79
Al Merreikh	30	20	8	2	50	16	68
Hay Al Wadi	30	12	11	7	35	25	47
Hay Al Arab	30	11	9	10	26	32	42
Al Khartoum	30	11	8	11	34	34	41
Hilal Obayed	30	10	11	9	25	32	41
Alamal Atbara	30	10	9	11	25	29	39
Al Ahly Merowe	30	9	11	10	24	28	38
Hilal El-Fasher	30	10	8	12	35	41	38
Al Hilal Port Sudan	30	10	5	15	27	33	35
Al Shorta	30	8	11	11	26	36	35
Al Ahly Shendi	30	9	7	14	21	27	34
Tuti	30	8	9	13	24	39	33
Al Ahli Khartoum	30	7	11	12	17	28	32
Al Hilal Kadougli (R)	30	5	10	15	22	39	25
Merreikh El-Fasher (R)	30	6	6	18	15	32	24

CONCACAF

MEXICO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
America	17	10	5	2	21	10	35
Atlas	17	8	5	4	21	10	29
Leon	17	8	5	4	20	14	29
Tigres UANL	17	7	7	3	26	14	28
Santos Laguna	17	5	9	3	23	16	24
Toluca	17	6	6	5	22	22	24
Puebla	17	6	6	5	16	16	24
Cruz Azul	17	5	8	4	21	17	23
Monterrey	17	5	7	5	19	16	22
Guadalajara	17	5	7	5	13	13	22
Pumas UNAM	17	5	6	6	17	23	21
Atletico San Luis	17	4	8	5	19	23	20
Mazatlan	17	5	5	7	18	24	20
Necaxa	17	6	2	9	16	22	20
Pachuca	17	4	6	7	19	21	18
Juarez	17	4	4	9	14	25	16
Queretaro	17	3	6	8	11	19	15
Tijuana	17	3	6	8	16	27	15

The top four teams qualify for the final phase last eight, with fifth to 12th qualifying for Reclassification

UNITED STATES

Eastern Conference

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
New England Rev.	34	22	7	5	65	41	73
Philadelphia Union	34	14	12	8	48	35	54
Nashville SC	34	12	18	4	55	33	54
New York City	34	14	9	11	56	36	51
Atlanta United	34	13	12	9	45	37	51
Orlando City	34	13	12	9	50	48	51
New York RB	34	13	9	12	39	33	48
D.C. United	34	14	5	15	56	54	47
Columbus Crew	34	13	8	13	46	45	47
CF Montreal	34	12	10	12	46	44	46
Inter Miami	34	12	5	17	36	53	41
Chicago Fire	34	9	7	18	36	54	34
Toronto FC	34	6	10	18	39	66	28
FC Cincinnati	34	4	8	22	37	74	20

New England Revolution win the Supporters' Shield after topping the overall table, and qualify for the MLS Cup play-offs along with the other top seven

Western Conference	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Colorado Rapids	34	17	10	7	51	35	61
Seattle Sounders	34	17	9	8	53	33	60
Sporting Kansas City	34	17	7	10	58	40	58
Portland Timbers	34	17	4	13	56	52	55
Minnesota United	34	13	10	11	42	44	49
Vancouver Whitecaps	34	12	13	9	45	45	49
Real Salt Lake	34	14	6	14	55	54	48
LA Galaxy	34	13	9	12	50	54	48
LAFC	34	12	9	13	53	51	45
San Jose Earthquakes	34	10	11	13	46	54	41
FC Dallas	34	7	12	15	47	56	33
Austin FC	34	9	4	21	35	56	31
Houston Dynamo	34	6	12	16	36	54	30

The top seven teams qualify for the MLS Cup play-offs, with Colorado Rapids advancing straight to the semi-finals with New England Revolution

2021 CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FINAL

Oct 28 – Guadalupe
Monterrey 1 (Funes Mori 9)
Club America 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Hernandez (Mex)

ASIA

2021 AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Quarter-Finals

West Region

Oct 16 – Riyadh
Al Wahda 1 (Matar 90+3)
Al Nassr 5 (Hamdallah 7, Masharipov 52, 65, Asiri 56, Al Najei 75)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Ma Ning (Chn)

Oct 16 – Riyadh
Persepolis 0
Al Hilal 3 (Al Dawsari 27, Gomis 50, 70)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Sato (Jap)

East Region

Oct 17 – Jeonju
Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 2 (Han Kyo-Won 39, Kunimoto 48)
Ulsan Hyundai 3 (Qazaishvili 13, Yun Il-Lok 45+1, Lee Dong-Gyeong 101)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Mohamed (UAE)

Oct 17 – Jeonju
Pohang Steelers 3 (Lim Sang-Hyub 53, 90+5, Lee Seung-Mo 70)
Nagoya Grampus 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Faghani (Irn)

Semi-Finals

West Region

Oct 19 – Riyadh
Al Nassr 1 (Talisca 50)
Al Hilal 2 (Marega 17, Al Dawsari 71)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Beath (Aus)

East Region

Oct 20 – Jeonju
Ulsan Hyundai 1 (Yun Il-Lok 52)
Pohang Steelers 1 (Grant 89)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Al Jassim (Qat)
AET. Pohang Steelers win 5-4 on penalties

2021 AFC CUP FINAL

Nov 5 – Arad
Al Muharraq 3 (Al Mardi 2, Jameel 74, Carioca 80)
Nasaf 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ko Hyung-Jin (Kor)

BANGLADESH

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bashundhara Kings (C)	24	21	2	1	60	10	65
Sheikh Jamal	24	15	7	2	53	28	52
Abahani	24	13	8	3	65	29	47
Saif	24	14	2	8	48	37	44
Abahani Chittagong	24	13	5	6	38	28	44
Mohammedan Dhaka	24	12	7	5	36	25	43
Sheikh Russel	24	11	3	10	36	31	36
Rahmatgonj MFS	24	6	7	11	23	31	25
Bangladesh Police	24	6	7	11	26	39	25
Muktijoddha SKC	24	4	7	13	18	34	19
Baridhara	24	4	7	13	33	63	19
Arambagh (R)	24	2	2	20	20	66	8
Brothers Union (R)	24	1	4	19	16	51	7

JORDAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ramtha (C)	21	14	4	3	37	15	46
Al Wehdat	21	13	5	3	39	14	44
Al Salt	21	10	10	1	31	15	40
Al Faisaly	21	11	4	6	39	20	37
Al Hussein	21	9	5	7	29	35	32
Shabab Al Ordon	21	7	9	5	23	22	30
Al Jazeera	21	7	6	8	33	32	27
Aqaba	21	6	7	8	20	24	25
Sahab	21	5	7	9	26	31	22
Ma'an	21	5	5	11	18	33	20
Al Jalil (R)	21	4	7	10	15	27	19
Al Buqa'a (R)	21	0	1	20	8	50	1

MALAYSIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Johor Darul Ta'zim (C)	22	18	3	1	50	9	57
Kedah	22	13	4	5	44	28	43
Pulau Pinang	22	12	5	5	37	30	41
Terengganu	22	11	5	6	33	20	38
Selangor	22	10	6	6	45	30	36
Kuala Lumpur City	22	8	9	5	27	20	33
Petaling Jaya City	22	6	6	10	16	28	24
Melaka United	22	5	9	8	25	31	21
Sabah	22	4	7	11	21	38	19
Pahang	22	4	6	12	23	37	18
Perak (R)	22	4	4	14	20	45	16
UiTM (R)	22	3	4	15	16	41	13

SINGAPORE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lion City Sailors (C)	21	14	6	1	59	21	48
Albirex Niigata S	21	13	7	1	50	19	46
Hougang United	21	10	4	7	48	40	34
Tampines Rovers	21	7	6	8	48	51	27
Tanjong Pagar	21	5	7	9	36	49	22
Geylang International	21	6	2	13	33	52	20
Balestier Khalsa	21	5	4	12	34	52	19
Young Lions	21	4	4	13	26	50	16

Internationals

2022 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

CONCACAF Section

● *3.5 finals places available*

Third Round

Oct 13 – Columbus
United States 2 (Dest 25, Moreira 66 og)
Costa Rica 1 (Fuller 1)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Parchment (Jam)

Oct 13 – Toronto
Canada 4 (Murillo 28 og, Davies 66, Buchanan 71, David 78)
Panama 1 (Blackburn 5)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Villarreal (USA)

Oct 13 – San Pedro Sula
Honduras 0
Jamaica 2 (Roofe 38, Fisher 79)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Lopez (Gua)

Oct 13 – San Salvador
El Salvador 0
Mexico 2 (Moreno 30, Jimenez 90+3 pen)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Fischer (Can)

Current standings	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mexico	6	4	2	0	10	3	14
United States	6	3	2	1	9	4	11
Canada	6	2	4	0	10	4	10
Panama	6	2	2	2	6	6	8
Costa Rica	6	1	3	2	4	5	6
Jamaica	6	1	2	3	4	8	5
El Salvador	6	1	2	3	2	7	5
Honduras	6	0	3	3	2	10	3

SOUTH AMERICA Section

● *4.5 finals places available*

Oct 14 – La Paz
Bolivia 4 (Ramallo 21, Villarroel 53, Abrego 84, Fernandez 90+4)
Paraguay 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Matonte (Uru)

Oct 14 – Barranquilla
Colombia 0
Ecuador 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Haro (Per)

Oct 14 – Buenos Aires
Argentina 1 (L. Martinez 43)
Peru 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Sampaio (Bra)

Oct 14 – Santiago
Chile 3 (Pulgar 18, 37, Brereton 73)
Venezuela 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Claus (Bra)

Oct 14 – Manaus
Brazil 4 (Neymar 10, Raphinha 18, 58, Gabriel Barbosa 83)
Uruguay 1 (Suarez 77)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Rapallini (Arg)

Current standings	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brazil	11	10	1	0	26	4	31
Argentina	11	7	4	0	19	6	25
Ecuador	12	5	2	5	20	13	17
Colombia	12	3	7	2	16	16	16
Uruguay	12	4	4	4	14	17	16
Chile	12	3	4	5	14	14	13
Bolivia	12	3	3	6	17	25	12
Paraguay	12	2	6	4	9	17	12
Peru	12	3	2	7	10	19	11
Venezuela	12	2	1	9	8	22	7

2021 SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP

Group Stage

Oct 1 – Male
Sri Lanka 0
Bangladesh 1 (Barman 56 pen)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Taweel (Syr)

Oct 1 – Male
Nepal 1 (Dangi 86)
Maldives 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Riskullayev (Uzb)

Oct 4 – Male
Bangladesh 1 (Arafat 74)
India 1 (Chhetri 26)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Al Shamrani (Ksa)

Oct 4 – Male
Sri Lanka 2 (Hamilton 57, De Silva 90+4 pen)
Nepal 3 (S. Lama 33, Bista 51, Ghalan 86)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Ashkanani (Kuw)

Oct 7 – Male
India 0
Sri Lanka 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Zajniddinov (Taj)

Oct 7 – Male
Maldives 2 (Mohamed 55, Ashfaq 74 pen)
Bangladesh 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Hassan (Irq)

Oct 10 – Male
Maldives 1 (Ashfaq 6)
Sri Lanka 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Al Shamrani (Ksa)

Oct 10 – Male
Nepal 0
India 1 (Chhetri 82)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Hassan (Irq)

Oct 13 – Male
Bangladesh 1 (Reza 9)
Nepal 1 (Bista 88 pen)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Riskullayev (Uzb)

Oct 13 – Male
India 3 (M. Singh 33, Chhetri 62, 71)
Maldives 1 (Ashfaq 45 pen)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Ashkanani (Kuw)

Final standings	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
India	4	2	2	0	5	2	8
Nepal	4	2	1	1	5	4	7
Maldives	4	2	0	2	4	4	6
Bangladesh	4	1	2	1	3	4	5
Sri Lanka	4	0	1	3	2	5	1

Final

Oct 16 – Male
India 3 (Chhetri 49, Wangjam 50, Samad 90+1)
Nepal 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Al Shamrani (Ksa)

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Dragan Stojkovic

Spain 1 Yugoslavia 2

1990 World Cup, Italy

In the summer of 1990, Dragan Stojkovic was on the verge of joining Marseille from Red Star Belgrade, and went to Italia '90 bidding to build on his growing reputation. The current Serbia coach reflects on the game in the knockout stages of that tournament that changed his life...

Match winner... Stojkovic in action at Italia '90

The legendary match against Spain at the 1990 World Cup deserves a special place in my album. I will remember it as long as I live; the two goals I scored in Verona marked my status in the national team.

The game was played in scorching heat, and a place in the quarter-finals was at stake. There was that indescribable feeling of knowing that millions of people at home were watching, and that you had the chance to go down in history.

The first goal was a masterpiece. It was the 78th minute and the score was 0-0. We started a counter-attack and, while I was running, I told myself: "Come on, just one more sprint". I had that kind of mental strength in me – when it was the hardest, I was able to step on the gas pedal. I always thought that if that defender had the strength to run back, I can have that strength too, and I'll be faster than him.

As I ran into the box, I could already see myself celebrating. I was just praying that Zlatko Vujovic could put the cross over Manolo Sanchis and that the ball would come to me.

Before the ball came to me, I didn't hesitate. Most players would have shot on target with a volley, but I made a dummy, sent Vazquez to buy a newspaper, and the rest is history.

Five minutes later we conceded the equaliser and the game went into extra-time. After a couple of minutes we got a free-kick from a good position. Dejo [Dejan Savicevic] was there, Pape [Safet Susic] was there, but I just told them: "Leave it to me".

Again I visualised the ball in the goal. It's an unbelievable feeling: I saw the angle, the wall, believed in myself, and knew that if the strike was powerful enough, if the ball was quick, if it got the downward trajectory, then Zubizarreta had no chance.

And that's exactly what happened. We went 2-1 up and held onto our lead until the end of the game.

Later I learned that even Pele enjoyed that first goal and that he had congratulated me via an interview for Italian media. I was so pleased with that – if you get a compliment from a football legend like Pele, that's a big honour.

I think everybody was impressed with that goal, because it was done in a beautiful way, in a way one can rarely see in big games. It was a move people were talking about for many years after and today, more than 30 years later, we still talk about it.

Interview by Vladimir Novak

Celebrations... Stojkovic gets congratulated by his Yugoslavia team-mates

> I made a dummy, sent Vazquez to buy a newspaper, and the rest is history

NEXT MONTH...

WorldSoccer

Awards 2021

THE RESULTS OF OUR 40TH ANNUAL AWARDS – AND THE PEOPLE WHO HELPED SHAPE THE GAME OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS

PLAYER

TEAM

MANAGER

PEOPLE

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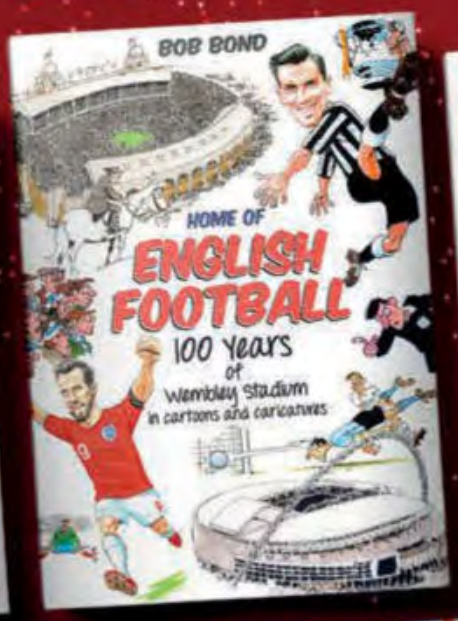

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